BY
THE AUTHOR
OF
THE ELSIE
BOOKS



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THE TRAGEDY

OF

WILD RIVER VALLEY

BY

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THE TRAGEDY OF WILD RIVER VALLEY.

CHAPTER I.

ALONG a quiet road a man was walking at a steady, swinging pace. He was above the medium height, strongly built, and his erect carriage bespoke him one accustomed to military drill, while the knapsack swung over his shoulder and the blue overcoat on his arm seemed to indicate that he was one of the returning veterans of the lately disbanded Union army.

His face, young and strongly Celtic in feature, was not unhandsome, though marred by a sinister expression. It was that of a bold, bad man on the alert to better his own fortunes without regard to the rights of others; and as he pressed onward he sent many a covetous glance toward the comfortable farmhouses, orchards, and rich harvest fields on either hand.

At length, turning aside from the main road and making his way through a bit of woods, he paused in front of a rude cabin standing in a

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potato patch, enclosed by a rough, zigzag rail-fence. An old man in patched, worn, and by no means clean garments sat on the door-step smoking a dirty pipe.

His wife stood just behind him with her knitting, a coarse woollen stocking, in her hands. She threw it from her as the traveller opened the gate, and with a wild cry, "It's me son! me bye Phalim come home till his mither at last!" rushed out and threw herself upon his breast, weeping for very joy.

He returned her embrace with ardor almost equal to her own, filial affection so softening his countenance that the evil look was banished for the moment.

The old man rose with trembling eagerness and grasped his son's hand. "An' it's yersilf, lad!" he cried. "Thank the blessed Vargin an' all the howly saints that ye've come back till yer mither an' me alive an' well afther all the fightin' ye've been in!"

There were rapid questions and answers, knapsack and overcoat were bestowed within the cabin, a chair or two were brought out into the shade before the door, and with a pipe apiece and a bottle of whiskey the three made themselves comfortable, while Phelim gave an account of his wanderings and exploits, inventing, embellishing, or suppressing occurrences as suited his fancy.

"An' have yees made yer fortin, Phalim, me

lad?" queried his mother, regarding him with a look of maternal pride and fondness.

"Not jist yit, ould lady," he answered, with an unpleasant laugh; "but," pulling out a handful of gold and silver coins and a roll of bank-notes, "here's the beginnin' o't."

She reached out an eager hand, while her old eyes reflected the covetous gleam in his. "Ye'll share wid yer ould fayther and mither, Phalim, me darlint?"

"Wan o' these days maybe," he said, returning the money to his pocket. "I'm goin' intil a line av business that'll pay; an' I'll have yees soon livin' in betther style," he said, with a contemptuous glance at their mean and squalid surroundings.

"Them's not all sodger's wages, me lad," remarked the old man, with a knowing look.

"Did yees iver hear o' bounty-jumpin'?" returned his son, with a coarse laugh. "It's been a dangerous business, but, faith, a payin' wan, too; an' a smart chap cud foind chances now an' agin to hilp hisself amang the rebs an' the wounded."

"An' Phalim wasn't the bye to neglict his chances; was ye, lad?" chuckled the old father.

"Niver a bit o't, dad; an' it's mesilf, Phalim O'Rourke, as manes to be a moighty rich man wan o' these days. Me gurrul, Belinda, shall roide intil her coach an' wear her foine goold ornaments an' her silks an' satins wid the best."

But observing significant glances passing between the old people, while his mother took her pipe from her mouth and shook her head ruefully, "What's wrong?" he demanded, the color paling on his sunburnt cheek; "don't tell me annything's happened till her, the purtiest and swatest gurrul in Ameriky!"

At that his mother burst out into an angry denunciation of the girl; she was unworthy of his love; she was faithless; she had been married for a year to an old farmer living some miles away. The man was well off, and his money, house, and land had bought the silly, faithless creature.

Phelim's face grew white with disappointment and rage as he listened to the tale; he clinched his fists and swore with horrible oaths that he would be revenged upon them both. He would shoot the old man dead in his tracks and blow out the brains of the faithless girl.

"Aisy, aisy, Phalim, me darlint! don't yees be afther runnin' yer neck intil a halter for the loikes av thim, the warthless varmints," returned his mother, alarmed at his vehemence.

"Sorra a bit o' that same," he growled; "there's niver a bit o' hangin' in this State."

"Eh! no; are yees sure o' that same?" she exclaimed, in surprise. "An' what fur wadn't they be for takin' the loives o' thim as takes other folk's?"

"It's agin the law," he answered, shortly.

"State's prison for life's near about as bad as swingin'," suggested the old man.

"But while there's life there's hope," remarked his son, significantly; "hope o' breakin' jail or being pardoned out; an' it's mésilf as wadn't be afeared to take me chance o' one or t'other."

"Ye wuz always a brave bye an' a lucky wan, Phalim," was his mother's comment as she rose and set about preparing the evening meal.

When the hour for retiring came Phelim declined to sleep in the house, averring that long use had made mother earth a more comfortable couch to him than the softest of beds, and taught him that he could breathe more freely under the open sky than beneath any roof. Spreading his army blanket under a tree some hundreds of yards distant from the cabin, he threw himself down upon it and fell asleep.

Hours passed on, while all was quiet save the murmur of a brook near at hand and the rustle of the night wind in the treetops; then a shrill whistle roused him.

He started up and listened. It came again, louder, shriller than before. He answered it, and moved swiftly in the direction of the sound, which seemed to come from the road from which he had yesterday turned aside to gain his father's dwelling. It was long past midnight, but darkness still brooded over the land,

and few were abroad save those bent upon evil deeds. To that class belonged Phelim and those who had summoned him to their aid. In the shadow of the trees bordering the roadside lurked three men awaiting the coming of their leader; for such Phelim was.

"Where are yees, byes?" he asked in an undertone as he drew cautiously near.

"Here, sor," replied a suppressed voice, in as rich a brogue as his own.

The three joined him, and a whispered conference ensued, the chief speaker being one who answered to the name of Teddy McManus. He was describing a country-seat, the situation of doors and windows, arrangement and contents of its lower rooms. "We'll git in aisy," he said; "wan o' thim kitchin doors ain't got no bolt at all at all—nothin' but a common lock; an' a wire'll turn the kay an' let us in as aisy as the masther hissilf walks intil the front door wid his latch-kay. An' thin it's all plain sailin'; dinin'-room nixt, solid siller a plenty on the sideboard; beyont that, jist acrost the hall's the lib'ry, where he kapes his money."

"But where he won't kape it much longer," put in one of the others.

"We'll do oor indivors to relave him o't the noight, if that's yer wull, captain," continued Teddy's rough voice.

"Yis, if yees are all agraable. What's yer wull, Gotlieb? an' yours, Pat?"

"I dinks we goes; and we petter makes haste," answered the first.

Patrick echoed the sentiment, and they set off at once, walking rapidly in a direction opposite to that from which Phelim had come some hours ago.

They were armed with pistols and knives, and carried with them a dark lantern and a full set of burglars' tools.

When the family at Walnut Hill rose from that night's slumbers it was to find that butter, bread, meat, and other edibles had disappeared from spring-house and pantry; also all the silver ware from the dining-room; and that the secretary in the library had been robbed of several hundred dollars in gold and silver, bank-notes, and United States bonds.

CHAPTER II.

IT was near sunset of a lovely June day. An hour earlier Dr. Jasper had invited his wife to drive with him a few miles into the country, whither professional duties summoned him. These had been attended to, and they were travelling toward their home in Prairieville again.

Their way lay along the bank of the river, which in this part of its course moved with majestic quiet, reflecting in its clear depths the beautiful blue of the sky overhead, the glories of the sunset clouds, and the overshadowing trees on the hither shore. On the opposite bank a stretch of white sand, a few feet in width, bordered green fields and meadows, beyond which rose richly wooded hills.

"It is a beautiful country," remarked Mrs. Jasper, in her soft, girlish tones. "But where now?" as horse and gig took a sudden turn in a westerly direction; "this is not the direct route home."

"To Lakeside, my dear," replied her husband.

"That is where the Heaths reside, isn't it?"

"Yes; and a very attractive place it is; I want you to see it."

"But, doctor, Miss Heath has not called upon me."

He gave her a half-reproachful, half-humorous look. "So I am your doctor? nothing nearer or dearer, eh, Serena?" he said, dropping the reins on his horse's neck and bending down to look into her eyes—large, soft, dark-brown orbs shaded by heavy silken lashes.

She was a handsome brunette, and so youthful in appearance that few would have taken her to be the mother of the three-year-old boy seated on a stool between them.

"You is my new papa, and me 'ikes you," remarked that young gentleman, rising hastily to his feet, with the evident intention of bestowing a hug upon the person addressed.

"Sit still, Perry; you'll fall out of the gig and be killed," said his mother, putting a hand on his shoulder and forcing him down again. "Alonzo, do make him behave."

"He's going to do that of his own free will," replied the doctor, smiling down upon the little prattler. "You know you must keep quiet, my little man, if you want to ride with your mamma and me."

"Miss Heath has not called upon me yet, Alonzo," repeated Serena, "and it is not according to the rules of etiquette for me to go there before she does."

"Ah, no matter for that, my love, since her failure to do so has not been for want of will,

but of ability; and to please me and poor Ronald, you will consent to waive ceremony in this instance, I am sure."

"How want of ability?" she asked, with a slight pout of the full red lips; "what has there been to prevent her? 'Tis over a week since we came to Prairieville, and the weather has been charming."

"Yes, I know; but Miriam Heath's life is a very busy one; she is a girl in a thousand. Why, my dear, since her mother's death, two years ago, she has actually carried on the farming herself; and she is only twenty-one, scarce a year older than her brave soldier brother."

"A woman farmer! odious! She must be a coarse, vulgar creature. How can you want me to visit her, Alonzo?"

"My dear Serena, you were never more mistaken," he said, warmly. "Miss Heath is as refined and ladylike as any woman of my acquaintance."

"That doesn't seem possible if she works in the field like a man."

He smiled. "It is the head work she does—overseeing and directing—while the actual hard labor, ploughing, sowing, reaping, foddering the cattle, and so forth, is done by hired men."

We will put in a few words the story of the Heath family, which the doctor proceeded to tell his wife.

The parents of Miriam and Ronald were per-

sons of education and refinement, native-born Americans, who shortly after their marriage had sought a home in this Northwestern State, locating themselves on the banks of one of those pretty little lakes so common in that region of country, and within a mile of the village of Prairieville.

When the War of the Rebellion broke out Mr. Heath was one of the first to volunteer for the defence of the imperilled Union, while his wife, equally full of patriotic zeal, undertook to fill his place at home in overseeing and directing operations upon their farm.

In this she proved herself most efficient and capable ; fields, orchard, and garden flourished under her sway, cattle increased in numbers and grew sleek and fat.

In the second year of the war her husband came home sick and wounded, to die in her arms. His eldest son, a lad of eighteen, then enlisted in the Union army, and when, a few months later, Mrs. Heath followed her husband to the grave, Miriam assumed the whole burden laid down by her mother—the superintendence of the farm, and, with the assistance of her grandmother, the care of the house and of a little brother and sister many years younger than herself and Ronald.

Serena listened to the tale with interest about equally divided between it and the beauties of the landscape.

For the first quarter of a mile the road made a gradual ascent ; then the home of the Heaths came into view—a comfortable and tasteful dwelling, on the hither side of the pretty sheet of water from which it took its name. A grove of forest trees half hid the house from sight as they approached, but passing that, vine-wreathed porches, lawn, and flower-garden in the foreground, and the rippling, sparkling waters of the lake beyond, added their attractions to the scene.

Serena uttered an exclamation of delight. " Why, it's a sort of paradise !"

" A very fine situation," responded the doctor ; " high and healthful. Look off yonder, my dear ; there lies Prairieville, apparently almost at our feet. They have a fine view of it from the front porch."

" And that side porch overlooks the lake ?"

" Yes. The sitting-room opens upon it, and at this hour we are likely to find the family gathered there."

They were there at that moment ; the early tea had been partaken of and cleared away, and the grandmother with her knitting and Miriam with her sewing had seated themselves near the hammock in which Ronald, pale-faced and thin, and with his left arm in a sling, swung slowly to and fro. The two little folks were present also ; Olive turning over the leaves of a picture-book, Bertie, a little apart from the others, trying to teach his dog Frisk a new trick.

Ronald was a dark-eyed, handsome youth, but just now haggard and worn; hardly more than the ghost of himself, as Miriam had said again and again in tremulous tones and with eyes full of tears since, less than a fortnight ago, he had come home to her to be nursed back—if such were the will of Providence—to the health and strength of which wounds and months of languishing in rebel prisons had deprived him.

His return was matter of great rejoicing to each member of the household, yet their joy was tempered with many a pang at thought of his sufferings, past and present, and of the dear parents who would return no more.

"Grandma and Mirry," he said, breaking a silence which had fallen upon them for a few moments, "this is paradise. What a luxury to breathe this pure, sweet air; to gaze on your flower-garden there, so full of beauty and sweetness; the green grass, the waving trees, and the lake beyond! How its waters sparkle in the light of the setting sun!"

"Yes, we have a lovely and delightful home here," responded his grandmother.

"And you are one of those who appreciate their mercies, Ronald," Miriam added, with tender look and tone.

"I doubt if I am an unusually thankful person," he said, glancing around at her with a patient smile; "but no one who has spent weeks

and months shut up in a squalid, filthy prison, devoured by vermin and fed upon food a dog would turn from, could help enjoying such a change as this."

"Tell us some more 'bout it, Brother Ronald," pleaded a child's voice at his other side.

"Ah, are you there, Bertie?" queried Ronald, turning his head to look at the speaker. "I thought you were playing with your dog."

"I was, but he's run off, and now I'd like a story."

"Well, what is it you want to hear?"

"Everything."

"Not all at once?" questioned Ronald, with amusement, stroking the child's head with his pale hand. "But something you shall hear, now while we are all together," he added. "I will tell you about the battle fought close to the house where Mrs. Jasper and her father and mother lived; though she was not Mrs. Jasper then, but Mrs. Golding, a very young, very pretty widow with one child, a little boy."

"Was that where you got shooted?" asked Bertie.

"That was the time and place where and when I received a wound that nearly cost me my life, and I shall never forget the doctor's kindness to me or the motherly care of the old lady; no, nor how good her daughter was to me and the other poor fellows. I don't wonder Dr. Jasper fell in love with her.

"I want you two to become acquainted," he added, addressing Miriam; "you are both so handsome and so nice, though as unlike as possible in character and in looks, that I think you can't help liking each other very much indeed."

"Yes; perhaps we shall fancy each other all the more for our lack of resemblance," responded Miriam, with a quiet smile. "Suppose you describe her to us."

"I will. Instead of your fair skin and dark blue eyes, she has brown eyes and a brunette complexion. You are quick and sprightly in your movements and your talk and are full of energy. She hasn't a bit of that, but talks and moves with a sort of languishing grace that is charming in her, but would not suit me in my sister. I am very proud of you, Miriam, and would not have you changed from what you are in any respect," he added, regarding her with eyes that were full of fraternal pride and affection.

"Nor I you," she returned, tenderly pressing his hand, which she had taken in hers; "you can hardly feel so proud of me as I do of my brave soldier-brother, who has fought and bled for his country. What have I ever done in comparison with that?"

"Somebody's coming! I hear wheels!" exclaimed Bertie. "Yes, there's Dr. Jasper's gig right at the gate; and he's helping a lady out; and there's a little boy, too."

Miriam laid aside her sewing, and hurried out to meet and welcome her guests.

The doctor introduced his wife, explaining that he had persuaded her to disregard the rules of etiquette and make the first call.

"I assure you I appreciate your kindness, Mrs. Jasper," Miriam said, with a warm grasp of the little gloved hand, and an admiring look into the brown eyes of the pretty ex-widow; "and Ronald will be delighted; he has just been telling us of all your and your mother's goodness to him;—yours, too, doctor."

Her voice trembled and her eyes filled.

"It wasn't much I could do," Serena said, in her soft, languishing tones, "and though I was the biggest kind of a rebel, I couldn't for the life of me help liking him; and so, just for his sake, you see, I yielded to the doctor's entreaties to come without waiting till you had called upon me," she added, saucily. "So won't you please take me to him?"

"Yes; he is just here on the porch, and will be delighted to see you," Miriam answered, leading the way.

Ronald would have risen to greet them, but both the doctor and Serena bade him lie still, for he was almost too weak for any other than a reclining posture.

The Jaspers were scarcely seated when there was another arrival in the person of a young, fine-looking man of gallant bearing, whom the

doctor and Ronald greeted most heartily as "Warren," and introduced to Mrs. Heath and Miriam as Captain Charlton.

He was evidently no stranger to Serena and her boy, the latter of whom speedily claimed a seat upon his knee.

Through Ronald, Miriam and Charlton had heard much of each other, and the captain had long felt a strong desire to meet the sister of whom his young friend always spoke with great brotherly pride and affection. He had expected to be disappointed in her, but he was not; he found something in her appearance, her manner, her conversation, that was irresistibly charming.

CHAPTER III.

THE Jaspers made only a short call, but when they had gone the captain still lingered, caressing little Olive, whom he had coaxed to the seat upon his knee vacated by Perry Golding, talking gayly with Ronald about some of the lighter experiences of their army life—for they had been companions in arms—yet furtively watching Miriam and frequently addressing a remark to her.

"That will be a match, you may depend upon it, Alonzo," Serena said to her husband, with a wise nod of her pretty head as they drove homeward.

"What will be a match, my dear?" he asked, giving her a roguish look and smile.

"Now, you needn't pretend that you don't understand me," she said; "you know very well what I mean. Captain Charlton is smitten with that handsome Miss Heath, and I saw in a minute that they were made for each other."

At that moment a horseman came dashing up at a gallop, bowing and lifting his hat as he passed.

"Colonel Bangs," murmured Serena. "Alonzo, I perfectly detest that man."

"In which you are by no means peculiar,"

replied the doctor; "overbearing and tyrannical to the last degree, and strongly suspected of cowardice in the face of the enemy, he was cordially hated by many of his men."

"Is he going to Lakeside, do you think?"

The doctor put his head out of the gig and glanced back at the house they had just left.

"Yes," he said, drawing it in again; "he has reined in at the gate. I suspect the captain is to have a rival."

"If it's the colonel, I don't think he need be alarmed," returned Serena. "What chance has a homely, disagreeable old bachelor beside a handsome, good-humored young fellow like Captain Charlton?"

"Ah, but the colonel is said to be in very easy circumstances; while Warren, poor fellow, has next to nothing."

The colonel had now dismounted, fastened his horse, and entered the gate. A middle-aged Irishman, a rough but good-humored-looking fellow, was at work at the flower-beds. He had saluted the doctor and his wife courteously as they passed him; the captain also; but looking up at the sound of Bangs's entrance, and seeing who it was, he simply scowled and turned to his work again.

"What are you doing here, you —— rascal?" demanded Bangs, in an insolent tone.

"Mindin' me own business, sor; an' it's yersilf that had betther be doin' that same, an' not

meddlin' wid an honest man as yees haven't got no authority over no longer."

A lightning glance of intense scorn, contempt, and hatred, accompanied by a volley of oaths and curses, not loud but deep; and with that Bangs turned and hurried up the path and around to the side porch, where the family and Captain Charlton were sitting. He was greeted politely, and invited to take a seat among them; but his arrival seemed to act as a damper upon the whole party; conversation flagged, and presently there was dead silence for a moment. It was broken by Bangs.

"This is a lovely spot," he remarked, sending a sweeping glance around. "I would advise you to have a care whom you employ. These fellows who have been in the army during the war"—and he nodded in the direction of the front garden—"are apt to be lawless, and too ready to help themselves to whatever they can lay their hands on. Got in the way of it, you know, plundering the rebs."

"I must say, sir, that I consider your remark grossly unjust to our brave boys in blue," said Captain Charlton, his cheek reddening and his eye flashing; "for though there could not fail to be many bad fellows among the immense numbers in the field, the large majority were loyal, true, and honest, and have gone back to civil life to gain an honest living at their old employments."

"Yes; and it is so with Barney Nolan, against whom you seem to be warning us, Colonel Bangs," Miriam said, with spirit. "Norah, his wife, who has been our charwoman for years past, tells me he is leading a sober, industrious life, treating her and his children kindly, and doing his best to provide for them."

"Humph! What kind of character did he bear before he went into the army?" sneered Bangs.

"He drank a good deal; but army life, it seems, has reformed and improved him. A rather unusual effect, doubtless," Miriam concluded, with a mischievous twinkle of the eye and a meaning look at her antagonist.

And now Mrs. Heath, the gentle old grandmother, desirous to pour oil upon the troubled waters, put in her soothing word.

"Yes, Barney is behaving very well indeed; and he and Norah are as faithful workers as one could ask for. And I think all the people about here are honest. I've never heard of a burglary anywhere in this region of country."

"You haven't? Well, I can tell you there was a daring and successful one last night at Walnut Hill, Judge Hall's place, which, you know, is not many miles up the valley," returned Bangs, with evident triumph.

The ladies were much startled; Ronald looked troubled and anxious; but Captain

Charlton received the news quietly, remarking that he had heard it some hours since, but thought it not worth while to annoy these friends with the story, as it could only rouse their apprehensions without doing any good.

"Have they been caught?" asked the old lady.

"The burglars?" queried Bangs, with a malicious smile. "No, madam; not yet."

Then he went on to describe the premises visited by Phelim O'Rourke and his confederates, and the valuables they had carried off. He seemed to take pleasure in enlarging upon the ease with which they had effected an entrance, and the fact that they were men evidently accomplished in the art of housebreaking and lock-picking.

Charlton made a movement to go; but an entreating look and word from Ronald led him to resume his seat, and he outstayed the colonel.

When the latter had gone, "What has he against Barney Nolan?" asked the old lady.

"Barney belonged to his regiment," replied Ronald, "and had to submit to many an act of outrageous tyranny from him."

"That would account for Barney's disliking him," she said, doubtfully.

"And for his dislike to Barney," added Charlton. "A man hates those he oppresses. Besides, it is quite likely the Irishman has retorted with his tongue, if in no other way, as who would not?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE robbery at Walnut Hill caused a good deal of excitement in Prairieville and for miles up and down Wild River Valley, but no clew to the perpetrators could be discovered.

O'Rourke and his confederates scattered themselves about for the time, seeking work here and there among the farmers, with whom it was a busy season, behaved through the day like industrious working-men who had no thought of anything but earning an honest living by the sweat of their brows ; and if they met at night while others slept, to hatch their schemes of villainy, it was always in some lonely and unfrequented spot—the depths of a forest, a cave among the hills, or by the river-side, far from any dwelling. Thus cunningly they continued to elude suspicion for weeks and months, till at length it began to be said that the burglars must have been strangers to the community, who had committed the one act and then fled from the vicinity.

But when the harvest was garnered, and some farmers, having sold their wheat, were popularly supposed to have money in their houses, these were entered and rifled night after

night—now here, now there, at places miles apart; now near Prairieville, now five, ten, or fifteen miles away, either up or down the valley; and anon, the villains, emboldened by success in eluding justice, ventured occasionally even to enter the town and rob stores and dwellings where they had any reason to expect to find rich booty.

Excitement and indignation grew apace as it became evident to all that the valley was infested by an organized band of desperadoes.

Bangs, who was a prominent lawyer in Prairieville, very generally feared and disliked, tried again and again to fix suspicion upon Barney Nolan as one of the gang, but without success, as Nolan was liked in the community, being entirely inoffensive, good-tempered, and industrious.

Though a bachelor, Lawyer Bangs owned and lived in one of the finest dwelling-houses in the town. He had it very handsomely furnished, too, especially his parlor, bedroom, and private office.

His sister, Mrs. Wiley, kept house for him, and ruled with a high hand over her husband, an orphan niece, who was so unfortunate as to have no other home, and the maid of all work; the last named, however, being treated far more leniently than the other two, because she might go away if too hardly dealt with.

Mrs. Wiley dressed richly and sometimes

wore expensive jewelry. Lawyer Bangs liked a display of solid silver on his table; he was said to have brought home a quantity of it when he returned from the war; how procured was best known to himself; so that there was probably more to tempt burglars in that house than in any other private dwelling of the town, and it stood upon the outskirts, apparently more unprotected than most; yet, strange to say, it was not entered. Phelim O'Rourke, it would seem, had neglected to pay it a nocturnal visit, but he had been there frequently in broad daylight, closeted for an hour or more with the lawyer in his office.

But Phelim's name had not been connected with the burglaries; and no one denounced the scoundrels more loudly and indignantly than Bangs—or the colonel, as he preferred to be called, though he had resigned his commission with the close of the war.

Both he and Captain Charlton had been during all these weeks very frequent visitors at Lakeside. The latter had become a great favorite with all the family; his coming was ever hailed with delight by Ronald and the little ones; the grandmother invariably welcomed him with a smile and cordial grasp of the hand; and though Miriam's greeting was somewhat more formal and distant, the brightening of her eye at his approach and the slight deepening of the rose on her cheek did not betoken

dislike or even indifference to her brother's friend.

Bangs, on the other hand, could not but perceive that his visits were barely tolerated. The children shunned him, and Miriam did the same whenever she could without absolute rudeness.

It fired him with resentment and hatred toward Charlton, whom he looked upon as a favored rival, and filled him with a dogged determination to win the girl by fair means or by foul; she should marry him—willingly, if she would; but her hand he would have, whether her heart went with it or not.

Having come to this determination, he forthwith set his wits to work to find means to accomplish his end.

"If I could get a hold upon the property," he said to himself, "that would be the likeliest thing to bring her around. She's attached to the place; still more to that crippled brother and the little ones, and would sooner sacrifice herself than see them come to want. Yes, that will be my very best chance. I wonder if they have the farm quite clear of incumbrance, and if the title is without a flaw? I must find out."

It was one evening, while on his way home from a very unsatisfactory call at Lakeside, that Bangs held this conversation with himself. He had that day engaged a man to attend to his horse, and as he rode up to his stable the fellow stepped out and took the bridle.

Bangs alighted, and saying, "Rub her down well, O'Rourke, and give her a good feed of oats when she has cooled off," he walked into the house.

The sound of repeated vigorous blows, mingled with sobs and cries of pain, fright and entreaty in a shrill female voice, "Oh, Aunt Dora, I will be good! I will be good!" met his ear as he entered.

"What's all this about?" he growled, throwing open the door of the sitting-room, where a short, stout, broad-faced woman was belaboring with a rattan a thin, pale, undergrown girl of fourteen, who, held fast in the strong grasp of her tormentor, was vainly struggling to get free, and as vainly endeavoring to dodge the furious storm of blows rapidly descending upon her shoulders and arms.

"Oh, Uncle Avery, save me! she's killing me!" shrieked the girl.

"No interference; she richly deserves all she's getting!" exclaimed the operator between her set teeth, and turning on him a pair of light blue eyes, glittering with passion, as he strode across the room toward herself and the victim of her rage.

"What has she done now?" he demanded. "You wear yourself out in beating her, Dora; and I don't see that she's a whit the better for it. Come, come; whatever she's done she's had enough for this time, and I want to talk with you."

At that Mrs. Wiley released the girl, who threw herself, trembling and sobbing, on a lounge.

Bangs glanced at her half pityingly, half contemptuously ; then turning to his sister, " Were you going out?" he asked. " I see you have on your bonnet and shawl."

" No ; I've just come home from church ; where, by the way, you ought to have been with me."

" Not I, indeed," he returned, sneeringly. " I have no religious character to keep up ; never made any pretensions in that line ; one saint in the family is sufficient—especially of the kind I'm most familiar with."

" I fully understand your insinuations," she said, her eyes flashing with anger ; " but I shall do my duty by Mary, nevertheless. I must help her to conquer that dreadful temper of hers."

" ' Example is better than precept,' " he quoted, significantly ; " but what particular exhibition of temper had she given to entitle her to so thorough a flogging?—a punishment, by the way, rather unsuited, in my humble opinion, to a girl of her years."

" It's the only thing that has any effect," Mrs. Wiley asserted, with decision. " I reproved her for mislaying her gloves (she had laid them on the table in the parlor instead of carrying them up to her room and putting them

in their proper place), and you should have seen the scowl she gave me when I spoke to her about it."

"Well, well, enough said, Dora; though it strikes me that if I professed to be a saint, and had just come home from church, I'd feel called upon to exercise some patience with the faults and follies of youth. But come into my private office, for, as I said, I want a little talk with you on a matter of business."

Having led the way, and seen her dumpy figure comfortably ensconced in the large, leather-cushioned arm-chair, which usually held his own spare person, he opened the conference with an abrupt query.

"You are intimately acquainted at Lakeside, are you not? and esteemed there as a burning and shining light in the church?"

"How should I know whether they think me that or not?" she asked, reddening and tossing her head.

"Well, answer to the best of your knowledge."

"We've not visited much; but only because we lived so far apart, and are all busy with our own affairs and church work. They know I'm always active in those things; and I presume they have every confidence in my piety—as most people have who know me."

"But not too well—eh, Dora?" he supplemented, with a sneer.

"Avery, if you have nothing but insults for me, I'll go back to my own part of the house," she said, rising with dignity, while her face flushed hotly and her eyes sparkled with anger.

"Nonsense! we understand each other, Dora," he returned, with an unpleasant laugh, as he pushed her back into her seat—not roughly. "Stay and hear me out. I think you'll find it to your advantage to do that and something besides, which I am going to propose."

She yielded, though ungraciously and with a frowning face.

He told her of his purpose to wed Miriam Heath, and the small encouragement he had to hope she would ever become his bride of her own free will.

Mrs. Wiley's face grew darker as he proceeded. "Why do you seek her, then?" she asked in impatience. "She is no such prize that—"

"Pardon me, madam, if I venture to differ from you there," he interrupted, drawing himself up with a haughty air. "Miriam Heath is an uncommonly fine girl in both looks and character. Where, let me ask, could you find another who could and would do what she has done—carry on a farm and support a family in comfort?"

"I don't see what you want to marry for; you are much better off as you are," remarked his sister, ignoring his query.

"There, again, your opinion and mine fail to

coincide. I tell you, I am determined to make Miriam Heath my wife—willingly, if possible; otherwise unwillingly."

"I don't see how you can force her into it."

"I think I do; and I want your help in carrying out my scheme." He then unfolded his plans, and told her her part must be to cultivate the acquaintance of the family, and when an opportunity offered to worm out of Mrs. Heath the desired information. "Remember, she is the one," he said in conclusion; "the girl and Ronald would be too sharp to give it; the children are too young to know anything about such matters; but the old lady, of course, knows everything; and she is very simple-hearted, frank, and doubtless has entire confidence in you."

Mrs. Wiley demurred; was not sure it would be quite right to do what he wished—so she said; but the truth of the matter was that she did not want him to marry; for should he remain single, and she outlive him, she would be his natural heir.

He read her motives, and set them aside by remarking that if he could get the desired hold upon Miriam, and she refuse in spite of all to give him her hand, he would add Lakeside to his property.

The pale blue eyes opposite him brightened visibly. "And we might move out there," she observed, with ill-concealed eagerness. "It's a

lovely place. I have always thought the Heaths very fortunate in owning it. Well, Avery, every one must look after his own interests. I'll do as you wish."

"That's right, Dora," he returned with satisfaction; "but let me caution you not to broach the subject too soon, lest the old lady should think you prying and be put upon her guard."

"You may trust me to play my cards skilfully," she returned, bridling.

"And not to let the grass grow under your feet? Love is impatient, you know."

"Greed also," she added, with a malicious smile. "No; there shall be no unnecessary delay. Lend me Phelim and the horse and buggy to-morrow, and I'll drive over and open proceedings by making a call."

"They are all at your service whenever wanted for that purpose. You'll do, Dora."

Mrs. Wiley drove over to Lakeside the next afternoon. It was a bleak November day, and as she alighted at the gate Phelim growled out a protest against "bein' left to sit waitin' out here in the cowld."

"Keep yourself warm by exercise," she said, sharply. "You can fasten the horse, and pace back and forth in the path along the fence side there."

Bertie opened the door in answer to her ring, and ushered her into the sitting-room, where Ronald, reclining in a large arm-chair, was

reading aloud to his grandmother, who sat placidly knitting by his side. Miriam was not at home, as Mrs. Wiley knew, having passed her in the town.

The old lady rose with a polite greeting to the visitor, while Bertie set a chair for her, then returned to his play—helping Olive to build block houses in a corner of the room.

Mrs. Wiley was very sweet and condescending (how Ronald detested her for that last !), made a few commonplace remarks on the weather and the crops, then condoled with the lad on his protracted sufferings, and with Mrs. Heath because of the care that devolved upon her in the rearing of her grandchildren.

"I know how to sympathize with you," she sighed, "having burdened myself with the bringing up of an orphan niece. It is a great responsibility. I feel that she can never repay me for all I am doing for her; but I look to the Lord for my reward."

"And I am sure, if you are doing it for His sake, He will not leave you unrewarded," returned the old lady, her eyes glistening. "But, indeed, I cannot rate so highly my poor services to my son's children, and shall feel amply recompensed if they grow up to be good and useful members of society. In fact, Mrs. Wiley, they repay me now by their dutiful and affectionate behavior."

"Oh, grandma, you put too low an estimate

upon your good deeds !" remarked Ronald, half playfully, half tenderly.

"Child, I have never done any worth the name," she returned, with unaffected humility.

Mrs. Wiley changed the subject. Turning to Ronald, she spoke in glowing terms of the debt of gratitude owed by the country to her "brave boys in blue," the noble fellows who had fought and bled to save the Union (she must say it, even though her dear brother Avery was one of them), and she would try to do a little toward cancelling her own share of the obligation to Ronald by sending over some little delicacy now and then to tempt his sickly appetite ; she was reckoned a good cook—she did not say it boastingly—though, of course, not better than his own grandmother and sister ; but something sent in from a neighbor's was appreciated by an invalid just because it came from abroad.

Ronald thanked her, not too warmly, and added that he could not have her put herself to so much trouble ; his appetite was not bad, and home cooking really suited him better than any other.

At that her cheek flushed, and for an instant she looked ill pleased ; then laughing lightly, she remarked that no one ought to blame him for his partiality to those who were so very near and dear. Yet, as it was often desirable and beneficial to vary the diet, she would ven-

ture to do as she had proposed. It would be no trouble at all ; on the contrary, a real pleasure, for she loved to do good and to give.

" But we of this family are not in need, madam," he returned, his tone slightly sarcastic, " and your alms were better bestowed upon those who are."

" Oh, fie ! you must not be so proud," she said, adopting a sportive tone, though evidently with an effort. " You are a reader, I see," she added, glancing at the book he had laid aside on her entrance. " I hope you don't neglect your Bible ?"

" No, he does not," said his grandmother, answering for him ; " Ronald is a good boy."

" I rejoice to hear it," was the gracious rejoinder, " and I shall do myself the pleasure of bringing him some good books, of which I keep a supply constantly on hand on purpose to lend or give where I think they may prove useful."

Ronald could not bring himself to thank her ; but his grandmother did it for him, and with a parting nod and smile, and an injunction to him to take care of himself and get well as fast as possible, the visitor took her departure.

" What a good woman she is !" Mrs. Heath said, coming back from seeing her off. " What an earnest, faithful, working Christian ! always at the prayer-meeting, she tells me ; always engaged heart and soul in some good work. I wish I were more like her," and she sighed in-

voluntarily as she resumed her knitting and her rocker by the side of her boy.

"And I do not, grandma," he returned, with warmth; "you would not be half so dear and lovable as you are."

"My dear boy, how can you say it?" she asked, in mild surprise.

"Grandma, doesn't the Bible say it is not he that commendeth himself who is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth? And why does that woman put on such airs of condescension toward you? She is not your superior in any respect; no, nor half your equal in very many."

CHAPTER V.

A LITTLE crowd, mostly men, were gathered about the depot door to watch the arrival of the westward-bound evening train. A few yards farther from the track, Miriam Heath, seated in a buggy, had reined in her horse and was quietly waiting. At the first sound of the whistle, instantly followed by the rush and roar of the train, the animal started aside, snorting, and rolling his eyes wildly.

"Shall I take his head, miss?" asked a voice in a rich Irish brogue, and Phelim O'Rourke, hurrying from Bangs's stable to join the waiting throng, sprang hastily forward and seized the bridle-rein.

"No; I can hold him; he will be quiet enough as soon as he sees what it is," Miriam answered shortly, not overpleased at the officiousness of the man.

He stepped away a few paces and regarded her with a malignant scowl.

Her words were made good almost before they had left her lips. The train swept into sight, and her horse stood quiet as a lamb, while the engine puffed, snorted, and blew off steam,

and the passengers poured out and scattered themselves hither and thither.

A middle-aged man, with a sober, honest Scotch face, in decent farmer dress, and carrying a satchel in his hand, was among the first to alight.

"You're a gude leddy, as weel's a bonny ane, Miss Miriam," he said, hurrying toward her. "I'm no ill pleased to forego the pleasure o' a tramp through the cauld and ower the frozen, rough roads."

"I thought you would come back tired, Sandy," she returned, resigning the reins to him as he took the seat by her side, having already bestowed his satchel in the bottom of the buggy. "Besides, it will be safer, in case—"

"Wait a wee, Miss Miriam," he interrupted, in an undertone. "Along wi' ye! lively now, Robin!" to the horse, who at once set off at a brisk trot in the direction of home.

O'Rourke had watched the little scene with a sort of covert eagerness, and as the buggy whirled away up the road his eyes followed it with a look of lurking triumph and greed.

Neither of its occupants spoke again till quite clear of the town. Then, having first sent a cautious glance from side to side, Sandy, again speaking in a low key, as if fearful of being overheard, said: "It's gude news I bring ye, Miss Miriam; by the blessing o' Providence the wheat sold uncommon weel, and they paid

doon ; so that I hae a matter o' $1500 for ye—a trifle o' odd dollars ower that."

"Oh, Sandy, that is good!" she cried, joyously. "But I wish it were safe in the bank. If we could only have got it here in time!"

"Three hours sooner. I wish it could have been done, Miss Miriam. But we'll try to tak' care o't the night, and deposit it betimes i' the morn."

"Oh, if we only can, Sandy! Just think; we shall be able at once to pay off the interest on the mortgage and half the principal; and another such year will give us the place entirely free from incumbrance," she said, her eyes shining.

Sandy McAllister was her right-hand man on the farm, working with steady industry for day's wages; her true and trusted friend as well, knowing her affairs almost as intimately as she did herself, and taking a fatherly interest in her success and the prosperity of the whole family.

"Yes; what's ower and abune will be sufficient, wi' what the potatoes, and cabbage, and a' the ither crops o' vegetables, and the fruits will bring in, to keep the pot boilin' till anither harvest," he remarked, reflectively. "Ye'll win through, Miss Miriam; there's promises to the widow and the fatherless, and the Lord's aye faithful to His word."

It was nearly dark when they reached Lake-

side, but there was light and warmth in its cosey sitting-room, whither Miriam carried the satchel, while Sandy drove around to the stable and put up the horse.

The grandmother was dishing up the supper, Ronald keeping the little ones quiet with a story ; but on Miriam's entrance they left him, and ran to meet her with a shout of joy.

"Oh, sister, we're so glad you've come home ! We were 'fraid you'd got lost."

"Were you ?" she said, stooping to caress them in turn.

"Yes ; we were beginning to be uneasy ; it was growing so dark," said her grandmother, filling the teapot and setting it on the table. "Come now, dears, tea is ready."

"I believe the train was a few minutes behind time," Miriam answered. "Grandmother," and putting an arm round the old lady's neck, she whispered in her ear something that brought a pleased, thankful look into the placid face.

Then going to the side of Ronald's easy-chair, "The wheat sold well ; so well that we shall be able to pay the interest on the mortgage and half the principal," she said, in a low, joyous tone, leaning over him, her eyes shining and her cheeks dimpling with a glad smile.

"That is good news indeed !" he cried, his face reflecting the brightness of hers. "If we continue to prosper so, we'll have the place

clear in another year; also, I trust I may be able by that time to relieve you of at least a part of the burden of supporting the family."

"Ah, it takes two to make a bargain; and I may not be willing to resign my sceptre," she answered, gayly, as she threw off bonnet and shawl and took her seat with the rest at the table.

The meal was enlivened by cheerful chat, though the same anxious thought pressed more or less heavily upon the heart of each of the elders of the party. No one gave it utterance till the little ones were quiet in their nest; then, with every door locked and bolted, every shutter closed and barred, and the curtains drawn, the four (Sandy being always taken into their counsels) drew together and examined the contents of the satchel.

"A thousand-dollar bill!" Ronald said, turning it about in his hands, "and marked with some one's initials. Well, if the burglars should rob us of it they would hardly dare venture to use it."

"True, sir," said Sandy; "an' what's to hinder us frae spoilin' these ither anes for their use in the same way? Here's four one-hundred-dollar notes, one fifty, and the rest in fives, tens, and siller."

"A good idea," assented Ronald. "Mirry, please bring pen and ink."

The marking was done, and they were dis-

cussing the probabilities of a visit from the burglars infesting the country, and the best disposition to be made of the money for the night, when a loud knocking at the kitchen door startled them and set the hearts of the two ladies to beating almost audibly. Sandy rose to answer it, while Miriam hastily concealed the notes in the bosom of her dress.

"Mirry," whispered Ronald, "give them up rather than suffer yourself to be roughly handled. Sandy, don't open the door till you know who is there."

"Surely not, sir," returned the man, as he left the room, carefully closing the door behind him.

The others sat silent, straining their ears to hear.

Sandy held a moment's parley with some one; then the bolt was withdrawn, and the tones of a female voice, speaking with a rich Irish brogue, penetrated to the inner room.

"Nora!" exclaimed Miriam, in a tone of relief.

"A friend instead of an enemy, as we feared," added Mrs. Heath.

They had full confidence in Nora's honesty and good will; scarcely less in those of Barney.

"But she may come to warn us of danger," said Ronald, in a low tone of great anxiety.

The others had not thought of that. But Sandy was ushering Nora into the room.

"Good avenin' till yees, leddies an' Misther

Ronald, sor," she said, dropping a courtesy ; "an' I ax yer pardons fer throublin' yees this toime o' noight ; but it's all along o' Barney an' me a thinkin' yees moight be a thrifle onaisy in yer moinds, considerin' there's so manny thaves about, an' Misther McAllisther jist home from the city, an' maybe suspected o' bringin' money wid him, an' the bank closed so he couldn't put it there for safe kapin'. An' Barney"—she drew nearer, glanced cautiously around, and lowered her voice to a loud whisper—"he says, says he, 'Nora, I'm onaisy about Miss Miriam and the rest, for I see that raskil Phalim O'Rourke a prowlin' round while I was cuttin' wood in the back yarrud this afthernoon. He'd brought Bangs's sisther in the buggy, an' while she was intil the house talkin' wid the ould lady, he was makin' hisself acquainted wid the premisis. An' I'll be bound it wasn't fer no good, nayther.' "

"Is he one of the burglars?" asked Miriam, paling visibly.

"Barney an' me cudn't jist say that same, Miss Mirry ; but it's a thafe he was in the war ; an' he's makin' his ould fayther an' mither moighty comfortable in a nice little house in the town, that he's bought an' paid fer, an' nobody knows where the money come from ; fer how cud the spalpeen mak' the loike o' that same workin' round fer the farmers an' takin' care o' Bangs's horse?"

"It certainly looks suspicious," said Ronald; "but what is it you have to propose, Nora?"

"Jist this, sor; that if it's agrayable till the leddies an' yersilf, and wull make yees anny aisier in yer moinds, Barney'll come an' help guard the house till to-morrow mornin', an' not lave at all at all till the sun's up an' shinin'."

"That is very kind," said Miriam; "but what would become of you and the children if the burglars should take a fancy to pay you a visit?"

"An' sure, miss, what would they be afther in our poor bit of a hut?" laughed Nora. "There ain't nothin' there to stale, barrin' me an' the childer."

The kind proposal was acceded to with hearty thanks. Nora, rejecting McAllister's proffered services as escort, hastened away, and in a few minutes Barney presented himself in their midst.

The intervening time had been employed by them in disposing of the money for the night. Ronald would have had it laid under his pillow; but Miriam entered an indignant protest.

"What," she asked, "was the money worth in comparison with his life? That should not be risked by having the filthy lucre in the same room with him."

"The money is worth a great deal as the means of sustaining all our lives," Ronald answered, quietly; "but since you reject my plan, what other have you to offer?"

"I will take the smaller notes and conceal them upstairs. If they come and find the larger ones, they will probably think that is all and look no farther; so none of our lives will be endangered, and the notes, being marked, may be recovered."

"Yes," the grandmother said; "we will put them in the parlor, and in not too unlikely a place, lest they should come to our bedrooms in search of them, and if we happen to wake, kill us to keep us from telling of them, and so bringing them to justice."

These suggestions were immediately carried out. Miriam went into the parlor, without a light, fearing that even a slight gleam might furnish a clew to a lurking foe, put the bank-notes into a little chimney cupboard, locked it, and took away the key.

They retired early, as was their custom. Mrs. Heath, Miriam, and the two children slept upstairs; but Ronald's bedroom was on the ground floor, opening into the sitting-room where they had passed the evening.

In this last Sandy and Barney took up their quarters for the night, each armed with a loaded revolver. It had been agreed that each should take his turn in watching while the other slept, and that upon any sound of approaching footsteps, or an attempt of any one outside to open window or door, the sleeper should be instantly roused by his companion.

McAllister took the first watch, keeping himself awake with a book. Shortly after one o'clock he roused Barney, shaking him somewhat roughly, and saying in an undertone, "Come, me mon; it's my turn the noo; and richt glad I am, for I can scarce keep my een open ony langer."

They exchanged places. Sandy began to snore the moment he had stretched himself upon the lounge from which Barney had just risen; while the latter, weary with a hard day's work, and heavy with sleep, yawned in his chair, shook himself, sat erect, and stretched his eyes wide open with a determined air, then rose and paced the room, but with a stealthy tread, lest he should disturb Ronald.

He meant to be faithful to his trust, had no mind to be conquered by sleep, but fatigue presently sent him back to his chair; half unconsciously his head dropped upon the table, his eyes closed, and in another moment he was wrapped in profound slumber.

The clock on the mantel struck two, but both he and his fellow-watcher remained deaf to the sound. The hands moved steadily on and pointed to ten minutes of three, as something—he did not know what—startled and awoke him.

He sat up and listened. There was a slight noise—where? in the parlor? Yes; as of some one stepping cautiously across the floor.

Barney sprang to his feet, dealt McAllister a

smart blow to rouse him, seized a pistol, threw open the door into the hall, and rushed across into the parlor.

As he did so a man dashed past him to one of the front windows, which was open, as Barney at once perceived by the glimmer of light from the snow outside and the draught of cold air.

He sprang after the retreating figure and grasped it about the waist as it gained the window-sill.

But with a desperate effort, and a blow in the face that felled Nolan to the floor, the burglar freed himself, and springing lightly to the ground, sped away like the wind.

Barney was up in an instant and in hot pursuit, crying at the top of his voice, "Stop thafe ! stop thafe !"

Sandy, too, taking a flying leap through the window, joined in the race, echoing the cry with all the strength of his lungs, but with the Scotch accent instead of the Irish brogue.

But the burglar, being younger and fleeter of foot than they, and having the start of them, soon distanced their pursuit ; and uncertain which direction he had taken, and bethinking themselves of the defenceless state of those left behind at Lakeside, should accomplices of the fleeing scoundrel be lingering about, they made haste to return.

They found Ronald and the ladies awake and in great anxiety and alarm.

An examination of the parlor at once disclosed the fact that the cupboard door had been opened with a skeleton key and the money taken. Its loss was a great blow to the family, yet the fact that the notes were marked gave them some hope of their final recovery.

"I dinna see ony evidence that the mon had accomplices," remarked McAllister, when a thorough search of the house had been made.

"The tracks in the snow will settle that question when daylight comes to enable us to see them," said Ronald.

"Na, na, sir; it's snowin' fast the noo, and they'll be all covered up brawly by that," responded McAllister.

"Then take a lantern and look for them at once," Miriam said, speaking with energy and decision.

"An' so we wull! Sure, thin, the young misthress is the smartest o' the lot o' us all!" cried Barney, seizing a light and leading the way, McAllister following.

"Well?" Ronald asked, in an excited tone, as they re-entered the room.

"'Twas as I surmised, sir; the mon came his lane," said McAllister.

"An' it's mesilf that cud a'most tak' me oath that 'twas Phalim O'Rourke," added Barney, setting down the light, and turning from one to another of the little group in strong excitement. "I cudn't see his face that plain, to be

sure, fer the darkness, but I got a glimpse o't ; and the soize o' the raskil was as loike Phalim as the twin brother o' 'im."

"And who is Phelim O'Rourke?" asked Miriam. "Nora spoke of him, but I don't remember to have heard of him before."

"Sure, Miss Miriam, he's a returned sojer as wurruks fer Lawyer Bangs—takin' care o' his horse an' doin' anny ither chores wanted in the fam'ly. An' it's mesilf that niver loiked the look o' him, let alone that he didn't git the best o' characters from annybody in the rigiment ; in fact, miss, he had the name o' bein' as big a thafe as the nixt one."

"Are you willing to repeat what you have just said before a magistrate?" asked Ronald.

"Sure, sor ; an' fer what wouldn't I?"

"It will probably anger Bangs, as O'Rourke is in his employ."

"Sorra a bit wad I care fer that same, sor," returned Barney, with a scornful laugh, "barrin' the thrifle o' plisure it moight affoord me," he added, with a gleam of fun in his eye.

CHAPTER VI.

BEFORE the sun was an hour high Prairieville was greatly excited over the news of the burglary at Lakeside and the subsequent arrest of O'Rourke on suspicion of having been concerned in it.

He was, however, speedily at large again, Nolan not being able to swear positively to his identity, and Colonel Bangs coming forward with an *alibi* in his favor. He made oath that O'Rourke had been with him in his private office at the precise time when he was supposed to have been at Lakeside taking the money from the parlor cupboard.

He (Bangs) had had a fit of wakefulness, and thinking it must be time to rise, had summoned Phelim to light a fire in the office. On looking at his watch, when Phelim came in answer to the summons, he had found it barely three o'clock. Still, feeling sure he should not be able to sleep again, he had his order carried out. The fire was slow to burn, and Phelim did not leave the room till the clock had struck four—long after McAllister and Nolan had given up their pursuit of the burglar and returned to Lakeside.

This testimony, of course, completely exonerated O'Rourke, unless upon the unlikely supposition that Lawyer Bangs was perjuring himself to shield one in whom he had no greater interest than that of a master in his servant. Barney Nolan was, perhaps, the only person who still indulged strong suspicions against Phelim.

There was a grain of truth in the lawyer's story. He had called Phelim from his bed between two and three o'clock that morning, but it was by an arrangement entered into the previous evening, during a private interview held shortly after O'Rourke's return from the depot; and without waiting to light a fire at all the Irishman had set out on his evil errand.

After making good his escape from his pursuers (McAllister and Nolan) he gained Bangs's residence by a circuitous route, and, under cover of the darkness, crept cautiously in at a back door, opened for him by the lawyer himself, who had a few moments before taken his stand beside it, and was waiting there, listening intently for the expected sound of approaching footsteps.

"Ah, at last!" he exclaimed, half under his breath, as his accomplice stepped in. "Don't breathe so loud if you can help it; some one may be listening. This way—into the office."

They groped their way through the dark passage into a room beyond, dimly lighted by a

smouldering fire. Bangs struck a match and lighted a lamp.

"Won't it shine out intil the street, sor?" asked Phelim, glancing apprehensively around at the windows.

"No; can't you see that the shutters are closed and the blinds drawn down? Now, what success? I was never on any former occasion so anxious to have you succeed."

"I s'pose not, sor, seein' as there's on'y us two to divide the plunder this toime. An' it's mesilf as should pocket the lion's share, I'm a thinkin', seein' as yer honor kep' safe under shelter here, while I done all the wurruk an' tuk all the resk."

"Ah, but if suspicion fastens upon you, I'm the man to save you from the clutches of the law! But here, man, let's see what the spoil amounts to before we quarrel over the division."

At that Phelim drew a little package from his breast-pocket and opened it, Bangs looking on with eagle-eyed watchfulness and suspicion.

"Ah, what's that? a thousand-dollar note!" he exclaimed, clutching eagerly at it.

"Half's moine, sor; don't ye forgit that!" growled Phelim, keeping fast hold of one end.

"Tut, man! it's marked—do you see?—and won't be of any use to either of us," grunted Bangs, letting go of the note in disgust.

"Eh! What difference does that make?"

queried Phelim, examining it critically and with a crestfallen air.

"All the difference in the world; for, of course, we couldn't pass it without exposing ourselves to almost certain detection as having had a share in the robbery."

Phelim ripped out an oath, adding, "They's all marked—ivery wan ov thim; an' I've resked a tarm o' years in the pinetintiary fer jist nothin' at all at all!"

"Never fear; I'll take care of that," returned Bangs, grimly. "I can't afford to let you rot in prison so long as you share your profits with me," he added, with an unpleasant laugh. "You'd better leave these with me. They'll be of no use to you, and if found on your person would send you to jail in spite of all I or anybody else could do to keep you out of it."

"Mabbe they moight come intil use wan o' these days," muttered Phelim, turning the smaller notes over in his hands and gazing ruefully at them. "I'll kape these fer the prisent, and yer honor can hide that big wan in yer strong box, rememberin' it's to be divided atween us whin the toime comes."

"All right," said Bangs, adding to himself, with an inward chuckle, "but possession's nine points of the law."

Then he went on to urge the wisdom of leaving the smaller notes also in his care, assuring

Phelim it would be highly dangerous for him to retain them in his possession, till at length all but one were surrendered to him.

Phelim then stole on tiptoe to the attic room appropriated to his use, undressed, and got into bed, where, some hours later, he was found by the constable, fast asleep, and taken into custody.

Bangs, having seen the prisoner discharged, went directly from the magistrate's office to Lakeside to condole with the family on their loss and suggest measures for the recovery of the money and the apprehension of the thief.

On being told that the notes were marked, he expressed himself so confident of their final recovery that the despoiled family were quite cheered, and Miriam, in her thankfulness for the hope his words gave them, was more gracious to him than she had been for a long time.

He observed it with great satisfaction, and, thinking he had made a favorable opening, began putting questions, though in a guarded way, with the design of obtaining the information he so greatly desired in respect to their hold upon the property and the extent to which this loss was likely to embarrass them.

But divining his motive, her manner at once changed to one of extreme coldness and hauteur, as she gave him distinctly to understand that she would brook no prying into her affairs.

He replied with an angry denial of the cor-

rectness of the implication; his queries were put from a sincere desire to be of service, and from no other motive; prying curiosity was utterly beneath him—utterly foreign to his character. And with that he rose, bowed himself out, and went away in a rage.

"Mirry, dear," remonstrated the gentle old grandmother, "I'm afraid you are too proud and ready to take offence. It may be the colonel only meant to be kind."

"I don't believe it, grandma; I doubt if the man ever did anything from a purely unselfish motive."

"I fear you have mortally offended him," remarked Ronald, with a slight laugh.

"I hope so, indeed," she returned, her breast heaving and her eyes sparkling, "and that his sister may take up his quarrel sufficiently to secure us against a visit of condolence from her."

Vain hope! Bangs's anger was not of the kind to lead him to abandon his purpose; and the next day Mrs. Wiley, as sweet, smiling, and gracious as ever, again presented herself at their door.

Bertie showed her into the sitting-room, which she found quite deserted, though through the open door of the adjoining bedroom she caught a glimpse of Ronald reclining upon his couch.

"Is your poor, dear brother worse?" she asked.

"He's not quite so well to-day, ma'am," Bertie answered, placing a chair for her near the fire. "Please sit down, and I'll call grandmother."

"Sister Miriam too, my dear; I came to see them both."

"Mirry is busy with the baking; she can't come, I know; but I'll tell her," the child answered, softly closing Ronald's door, in obedience to a sign from him, then passing into the kitchen, where the ladies of the family were busied with housewifely labors, the grandmother preparing vegetables for dinner, Miriam making pies and baking bread; for they kept no servant or cook except in the busy harvest time.

Both turned an anxious look upon Bertie as he came in. They had thought, on hearing the ring, that the caller was probably Mr. Himes, the holder of the mortgage, coming for his interest. It was due that day; he had always been very punctual in calling for it, and hitherto had never failed to find it ready for him.

Bertie did not wait to be questioned. "It's that lady that always smiles and calls everybody 'dear,'" he said, "and she came to see you both—grandmother and Mirry."

"Mrs. Wiley!" ejaculated Miriam, her cheeks flushing hotly. "I wish she had less leisure to bestow upon us—enough to do at home to keep her there."

"Ah, well, child, we must try to have patience! I dare say she means to be very kind," sighed the old lady, hastily washing her hands and taking off the large work-apron worn to protect her neat calico dress. "I hope she won't stay long, though, or I shall not be able to get these potatoes and turnips ready in time for dinner."

"Never mind that, grandma," returned Miriam; "I can manage it all if you will excuse me to her; but I cannot and will not leave my baking to see her for even a moment."

Bangs had given his sister a detailed account of his yesterday's interview with Miriam, arousing in her breast fierce anger against the girl. "How dared she treat advances from my brother in that style!" she exclaimed, grinding her teeth. "She shall be well paid for it, the impudent hussy! I hope you are cured now of the desire to make her your wife; but get the property if you can. I'll do all in my power to help you."

"And with such an ally I can hardly fail," he responded, with grim satisfaction.

So this was the secret object of her call.

She had at first wished to see Miriam; but before Mrs. Heath came to her she decided that events had shaped themselves in the very best manner for the carrying out of her schemes; the old lady was likely to be just now in the state of mind most favorable to her designs

upon her; gentle-tempered and loath to see the feelings of another wounded, she would naturally feel anxious to make amends for Miriam's rudeness to Avery; and with a mind full of their recent loss, she would open her heart in response to well-simulated sympathy.

The event proved Mrs. Wiley's shrewdness and penetration; the guileless old lady straightway fell into her trap. But of course the wily woman approached her object in a roundabout way, and while she listened to a circumstantial account of the robbery, given in response to her earnest request, there was a second arrival.

Miriam, glancing from the window, saw the holder of the mortgage drive up to the gate in his farm wagon.

"There he is!" she exclaimed. "Bertie, run out and ask Mr. Himes if he will mind coming to the kitchen to see me. Tell him I can't leave my baking just now, and as there is a lady caller in the sitting-room, and no fire in the parlor, this is the only place where we can have a comfortable private talk."

Bertie obeyed, and in another minute or two Mr. Himes was stamping the snow from his feet on the back porch.

Miriam opened the door, bade him a cheerful good-morning, invited him in, and set a chair near the fire, apologizing at the same time for asking him there.

"Needn't say another word, Miss Heath,"

he said, seating himself and glancing about him ; "it's a nice, comfortable place to come to out o' the cold and the snow ; neat as wax and warm as toast. But I'm in somethin' of a hurry, having a long ride to get back home, ye know, and it's snowing so fast that the roads will be dreadful heavy afore night ; so you'll excuse me if I begin on business at once."

Miriam had grown pale, and he noticed it.

"I don't want to be hard on ye," he said ; "you've always been prompt with that interest, and I know you was a hopin' fer to pay off a part o' the principal this fall. I don't calkilate ye can do that now (I heard in town this mornin' ye'd been robbed ; and I'm mighty sorry fer it, fer your sake as well's my own ; and I say that gang o' burglars had ought to be strung up higher'n Haman, every one on 'em) ; but I hope they didn't git all, and that you kin let me have the interest, for I'm wantin' it bad."

"I wish I could, Mr. Himes," Miriam said, low and falteringly ; "but the burglar got so nearly all, that I can pay only fifty dollars today."

"Why, that's only a quarter of it !"

"Yes, I know ; and I'm very sorry."

She went on to explain about the loss of the notes and the ground of their hope of speedily recovering them, adding a promise to pay off the remainder of the interest and half the principal immediately upon their restoration.

"Well, well, I hope ye'll git it," he said. "I don't want to be hard on ye," he repeated; "if ye can't, ye can't; and though it's dreadful inconvenient, I'll wait a little, hoping the rascal will be caught with all he stole from you."

Miriam took her purse from her pocket and a fifty-dollar note from it. "You see I expected you, Mr. Himes," she said, with a sad sort of smile, and pointing to a little side table, where were pen, ink, and paper. "Will you write me a receipt for this? And then, if you are not in too great haste, you must let me set you out a lunch, for you must be hungry after your long ride."

"Thank'e; I am that; and your cookin' has a powerful good smell," he returned, pocketing the note, seating himself at the table, and taking up the pen; "I don't know but it'll pay to take time to snatch a mouthful or so."

Regarding this as an acceptance of her invitation, Miriam moved briskly about, spread a snowy cloth on one end of the large table at which she had been at work, and by the time the farmer had gone through with the business of writing the receipt—a slow and toilsome one to him—had quite a tempting little repast of cold meat, hot rolls and butter, pie, and gingerbread ready for him.

He did it hasty but ample justice—eating being more in his line than writing—thanked her with hearty praise of her cooking, and went

away, his parting words a strongly expressed hope that the apprehension of the thief would soon put her in a position to keep her promises of payment to him.

As Miriam closed the door upon him and turned to her work again, her heart was heavy with a sad foreboding of the consequences to her dear ones and herself should that hope fail of realization.

"Bertie," she said, noticing the child standing at the window intently watching Mr. Himes as he made his way down the garden-path toward his horses and wagon, "what made you stare so at the man while he was eating? I was quite ashamed of your rudeness."

"Why, sister," returned the child, slowly, "he never thanked the Lord at all for his victuals, and I was watching to see him choke —you know grandmother said the other day she should expect to choke if she did that way. But he didn't, though, not a bit."

"Grandma would tell you that our Father in heaven is very kind and patient with us all, and that that is another reason why we should not abuse His goodness," Miriam answered, in a cheerful tone, the thought of that goodness helping her to throw off for a time her heavy burden of care.

Not much occurring in her vicinity ever escaped the sharp eyes and ears of Madam Wiley. She had seen Mr. Himes piloted by

Bertie to the kitchen door, and full of curiosity in regard to his errand there, had strained her ears to hear the talk between him and Miriam ; but the girl's tones were low, the farmer's utterance was indistinct, and Miriam had purposely seated him on the side of the room farthest from the communicating door between it and the sitting-room ; besides, there was the distracting necessity of listening to and answering the remarks of Mrs. Heath.

With all these hindrances, the seeker after information found the task she had set herself beset with difficulties. She could not get so much as an inkling of the subject-matter of discourse in the kitchen.

It was very provoking ; and only by the most determined effort was she able to maintain her suavity of speech and manner and pay sufficient attention to what the old lady said, to avoid answering wide of the mark. But at last the farmer went, and rallying all her energies to the successful carrying out of her purpose, she skilfully drew the old lady on to pour into her sympathizing ear the story of their family difficulties and perplexities.

" But, dear Mrs. Heath, you surely need not feel quite cast down by this loss, seeing that you own this lovely place. You have it quite clear of incumbrance, have you not ?—no mortgage on it ? no flaw in the title ?" she at length queried in her sweetest, most tenderly sympa-

thetic tones ; and her victim was just beginning a sad-voiced, hesitating reply when Ronald, who had some time before softly set his door ajar, called :

" Grandmother !"

" Ah ! excuse me for a moment, my boy is wanting something," the old lady said, hastily rising and hurrying to him.

He motioned to her to close the door after her ; then, drawing her down to him, whispered in her ear, " Grandmother, don't trust that woman ; don't let her know anything of our affairs."

" Well, no, child, not if it vexes you ; but I'm sure she means very kindly. But what shall I do ? I never was good at evading questions ; I can't tell a lie, and don't know any other way to avoid telling the truth."

" Well, I'd sooner talk to her as Mirry did to her brother the other day than let her pry into the family secrets. But bring her in here to see me, and let me always be present at your interviews after this. I'll warrant she'll put a curb upon her curiosity when I'm by."

In accordance with his wishes, the invitation was promptly given ; but suddenly, finding it high time she was at home, the unwelcome visitor took her departure.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. HIMES, or "Old Himes," as he was often, with irreverent familiarity, designated in the neighborhood, took his seat at the supper-table in his own kitchen and looked across it with an expression of mingled contempt and disgust at the woman who sat opposite and poured his coffee.

Her face, though young and blooming, was hardly clean; her frowzy, unkempt hair was in curl papers over her forehead; her dress, originally a gayly colored calico, soiled, faded, and torn—a not inviting picture for even a rough, hard-working old farmer to see at the head of his table.

"Things has changed considerable since courtin' days, B'lindy," he remarked in a bitter, sarcastic tone. "You used to slick up real nice in them times when you knowed I was comin'."

"Of course I did; but now my fortin's made, what ud be the use o' goin' to all that trouble?" she returned, with a short laugh.

"It's a kind o' cheatin', I think," he went on, eyeing her with increasing disgust, "to 'low a man to marry you with the idee that he's

gettin' a neat, managin', orderly woman, and then turn out a slattern such as you."

"Not a bit more cheatin' than fer a man to give a woman the notion that he'a a goin' to pet and humor her and give her everything she wants, and then, when he's got her fast, turn out mean and stingy and hard, wantin' to force her to work mornin', noon, and night, like a nigger, and never have nothin' decent to wear, let alone a cent o' money to call her own," she retorted, angrily.

"I was just objectin' to your not lookin' decent. You've got clo'es a plenty if you'd wear 'em."

"I haven't. I'd ought to have a new dress this minute, and a handsome one too. I'm sure I deserve it fer throwin' myself away on an old codger like you when there was a plenty o' likely young fellers as would a been glad enough to get me, and treat me decent, too!" she cried, bursting into angry tears.

"That isn't no way to get nothin' out o' me, I kin tell ye!" he growled.

"You're an old brute! You're always abusin' me," she sobbed. "As if anybody could keep fixed up and doin' all the hard, dirty work I have to do."

"Some folks kin. There's Miss Heath, now; no matter what she's doin' she's always neat as a pin—hair done up smooth, dress clean and fresh, if it ain't but a cheap calico."

"Pity you hadn't married her!"

"Just what I think—if I could a got her. Don't know about that, seein' as I never asked her. I was fool enough to be took in with your black eyes and red cheeks and simperin' ways. But I wouldn't a been if I'd knowed what a poor fist you'd make at housekeepin' an' cookin', lettin' things run to waste, and how you'd spoil all your good looks by keepin' yerself more'n half the time so slatternly and dirty. Neatness and cleanliness are better, to my way o' thinkin', than all the finery in the world."

They were an ill-assorted couple, of uncongenial disposition and utterly dissimilar tastes and opinions, as was not surprising in view of the fact that they had been very differently brought up, and that she was the younger by some forty years.

She, a penniless, almost friendless orphan, had married for a home and with the vain expectation of being a petted darling, who would have little to do but deck herself in finery; he, to gratify a sudden foolish fancy which had speedily changed to disgust when he became acquainted with the true character of its object.

Such scenes of mutual anger and recrimination were now by no means of rare occurrence between them. He presently rose, and with a parting fling at her untidy appearance and faulty housewifery, went out to attend to his cattle.

Belinda, springing to her feet, shook her clinched fist at his back as he disappeared through the doorway, and muttering, "You old tyrant, I'll pay you off one o' these fine days, that I will!" began gathering up the dishes and clearing the table with angry jerks and a great deal of clatter.

She smiled a grim smile of satisfaction as, on going to the door an hour later, she saw her husband walking briskly down the road in the direction of the nearest neighbor's.

"There, he's off for a good long talk with Mr. Harkness, and I'll have the house to myself for awhile," she said, half aloud, having, from being much alone, fallen into the habit of talking audibly to herself.

The sun had set, and within doors it was growing dark. She lighted a lamp, swept and otherwise set to rights her dirty, disorderly kitchen, released her hair from its curl papers, combed, brushed, and arranged it becomingly before a looking-glass hanging on the wall above a side table.

Then, lamp in hand, she went into an adjoining bedroom, where she changed her dingy, dirty dress for a comparatively new and clean one, adding to her adornment collar, cuffs, and a showy breastpin.

She stood for several minutes smiling and simpering at her reflection in the glass; then, pulling open a bureau drawer, took from it a

scarlet shawl, which she folded with care and threw over her plump shoulders. Next, a bonnet of crimson cotton velvet profusely trimmed with cheap feathers and flowers was taken from a bandbox, turned about admiringly in her hands, then tried on before the glass with a repetition of the simpering and smiling.

"It's just splendid!" she said, aloud, "and the becomingest thing out. But what on earth was that?" she cried, starting, and turning toward the window with a frightened look. She had seemed to hear a quick breath, a muttered curse.

She stood for a moment trembling with fear, gazing at the window with dilated eyes. There were no shutters, but a short muslin curtain was drawn across the lower sash, completely obstructing her view of any and everything that might be upon the outside. "What was there?" She dared not go nearer to examine and satisfy her doubts by raising curtain or sash and looking out.

But there was no repetition of the sound, and presently she concluded she had been mistaken; it was all imagination; and she fell to admiring herself and her finery as before.

There was a face at the window, pressed close against the glass, where the parting of the curtain left a slight opening through which a good view might thus be obtained of all that was transpiring within the room. It was the

face of a tall, stoutly built man, very much younger than her husband and more comely of feature, but his expression as he glared upon her was at times almost diabolical.

"Yes, them's the things she's sold herself fer," he muttered, grinding his teeth with rage. Then, softening a little, "But she is a purty craythur, an' it's mesilf, Phalim O'Rourke, that cud a'most be fool enough to thry her agin if the ould thafe of a husband was out o' the way."

Then again, as he watched her childish delight in her finery, the smiling, dancing eyes, the rosy cheeks dimpling, and the red lips wreathing themselves in smiles, his face darkened with jealous rage, and muttered curses were on his tongue. She was happy with his rival, the man who had robbed him of her (the pretty girl who had promised herself to him before he went away to the war) by the superior attraction of a well-filled purse.

The terror in her face when she overheard his curse gave him a sort of fiendish delight for the moment. He would not have cared had she come to the window and found him there, yet he thought it more prudent not to make her aware of his presence or further excite her fears.

At length the sound of approaching footsteps crunching the hard, frozen snow in the road on the other side of the fence sent him from the window.

He stepped quickly into the shadow of the house, then behind a tree, whence he could have almost laid his hand on the shoulder of the old farmer as he passed on his way from the front gate to the kitchen door.

"I moight a blowed his brains out and he'd never a knowed what hurt him," the intruder said to himself with a bitter laugh as he turned and stole away to seek shelter in the barn.

Meanwhile Himes was shaking and pounding the kitchen door. Belinda heard him, hastily threw aside bonnet and shawl, snatched up the lamp, and hurried to admit him.

"What are ye locked up fer?" he growled. "Keep a man freezin' outside till ye choose to let him in, will ye?"

"'Twasn't two minutes," she said; "and I can tell you I'm not a goin' to stay here alone after dark with the doors unfastened and burglars about."

"Fixed up at last!" he remarked, jeeringly, and eyeing her askance as she set the lamp on the table.

Picking it up, he walked into the bedroom. She had left the door ajar in her haste, and he seemed to know by intuition that she had been there, and at something she would prefer to hide from him.

That was the fact; for though he must, of course, learn at some time of her new purchases,

she wished, since it was sure to anger him, to put off the evil day as long as possible.

She followed him with a half-terrified, half-defiant air.

"What, more finery?" he exclaimed, turning on her, his face flushing angrily. "Do you intend to ruin me, woman?"

"I've earned it—every cent of it—and ten times more!" she said, straightening herself and regarding him with scornful, flashing eyes. "Do you suppose I'm a goin' to cook, bake, wash, scrub, and mend for you fer nothin'? Not if I know myself, I ain't!"

"Humph! We'll see about that!" he grunted. "I'll go to every store in Prairieville and Riverside, Frederic and Fairfield, and tell 'em not to trust you, fer I won't be responsible fer yer debts."

"Very well; then you'll pay good wages to me or somebody else, or do your work yourself!"

He made no reply in words, but snatching the bonnet, carried it out to the kitchen, and threw it into the fire. She rushed after him, and made frantic efforts to save it; but he held her back, and grimly smiling, watched it slowly burn to ashes.

Then she dried her eyes and vowed vengeance; she would have a divorce and make him maintain her without work.

"I hain't the least objection in the world to

the first part o' that," he said, "but we'll see about t'other."

For hours darkness and silence had reigned supreme in the farm-house. Belinda had wept herself to sleep by the side of her now detested spouse, and he, too, was wrapped in slumber most profound.

The door from the kitchen opened with sudden, noiseless movement, and with equally noiseless step a tall, dark figure drew near the bed. Slowly and cautiously it turned the light of a dark lantern upon the face of the sleeping woman and bent over her a darkly scowling face whose eyes gleamed with concentrated rage and hate.

He held the lantern in his left hand, in the right a dagger. He glanced at it, at her, and back again at it. Had her eyes opened at that instant, perhaps she would have died of fright; but she slept on, breathing softly and regularly, though her face wore a sad and troubled look, and traces of tears were on her cheeks, her pillow wet with them.

The sight moved him, stern and revengeful as he was; he gazed on, his face gradually softening, and finally turned away, slipping the dagger into its sheath, then half withdrawing it as his eye fell on the old man on the farther side of the bed, soundly sleeping also, with his face to the wall, and little dreaming that there was but a step between him and a death of violence

and blood. One moment of hesitation, and the intruder withdrew as stealthily as he had entered, passing on through the kitchen into the open air.

"I'll let 'em alone," he muttered, "and they'll revinge Phalim O'Rourke on aich ither better'n he cud do it hisself; an' that widout anny danger o' State prison fer sendin' 'em aforehand to purgatory, that mabbe wadn't be no worse nor what they're makin' atween theirselves now."

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was a belt of timber, principally oak and hickory, on the Himes place, and one afternoon the old man informed his wife that "a young feller was comin' to help him for a week or so fellin' trees and cuttin' 'em up into cord wood."

"More work for me, I s'pose," she said, in a sullen tone.

"He'll board and lodge here. You kin git a room ready fer him and set an extry plate onto the table. He'll be here to supper to-night if he's a man o' his word," was the nonchalant reply. And Mr. Himes stepped from the kitchen door and walked off in the direction of the barn.

Belinda's face brightened as she went upstairs and busied herself in making a bed in a little room usually appropriated to the use of the hired man, when they had one. They had now been without one for some time, and she was inexpressibly weary of the uncongenial society of her old husband. Any change, she thought, must be for the better.

She was bustling about, setting her table while the supper was cooking over the fire,

when the outer door opened, and a man's step —not that of her husband, yet strangely familiar—crossed the threshold. She turned to see whose it was, then uttered a low cry full of terror, while her cheek blanched and the dish in her hand fell to the floor with a crash and lay in fragments at her feet.

For several minutes they stood silently gazing into each other's eyes, hers dilating with fear, his stern and gloomy, a grim smile upon his lips.

"Yis, it's me," he said at last; "an' what have ye to say fer yersilf, false, desateful, treacherous craythur that ye are?"

"They told me ye was killed," she answered, in a shaking voice, staggering back and dropping into a chair, but never taking her eyes from his face; "shot down dead in one o' them awful battles; and I thought it must be your ghost."

"I'm a livin' man an' no ghost," he returned, with a mocking laugh. "An' ye soon comforted yersilf wid ould Himes and his house an' farm, did ye?"

"What could I do? When you was gone, the rest was all alike to me. I'd no home, nobody in the wide world to care for me," she sobbed, covering her face with her hands; "and he said he'd be so good to me—I should have everything I wanted. But it isn't so; he's an awful man to live with; and I'm just heart broke, that I am!"

"An' if 'twas all to do over agin, ye wadn't give me up fer the likes o' him—house an' farm an' all?" he queried, drawing a step nearer and bending toward her with an eager look in his eyes, while his tones softened till they were almost affectionate.

"Never!" she cried, passionately. "I'd take you without a penny sooner than him with all the gold of Californy." And her face, lifted to his, was full of yearning love and entreaty.

"I knowed it, me own darlint, jewel o' me heart!" he cried, clasping her in his arms and heaping fond caresses upon her. "It's an evil fate that's come atween us; but him that's robbed me's an ould man, an' I'm young, an' mabbe my turn 'll come when he's took out o' the way."

"Go! go! run! he'll be here in a minute, maybe, and kill you if he finds you here!" she cried, hastily releasing herself and pushing him from her.

"Kill me! ha! ha! that wake ould man! Do yees think I'd come off second best in a foight wid the loikes o' him?" he asked, with a scornful laugh. "But yees needn't be afeard, B'lindy; I'm the chap as he's hired to help him chop down his trees."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a look of relief. "But we must behave cautious, Phelim—mustn't let him suspect as we've ever set eyes on each other till now."

He assented to the wisdom of her proposition, and as footsteps were heard approaching from without, moved quickly to the farther side of the room, and as the master of the house came in, seemed very much engaged with the county paper which he found lying on the window-sill.

Belinda was stooping over the fire, stirring something stewing in a pan.

"Supper not ready?" Himes asked, in a surly tone. Then, catching sight of the newcomer, "Ah! so you're here, O'Rourke! Well, set up to the table. I guess we'll have something to eat after a bit."

By previous arrangement, Teddy McManus was to temporarily supply Phelim's place with Bangs, thus leaving Phelim at liberty to stay away as long as should seem advisable for their common interest. He accordingly spent several weeks in the employ of Farmer Himes, felling trees and cutting wood all day in company with the old man, and often, in the long evenings, enjoying a stolen interview with Belinda when a call upon some neighbor or a visit to the nearest town had taken her husband out of the way.

The woman's conscience troubled her sorely at times; she knew she was doing very wrong, now that she was the wife of another man, to let this one talk to her in the old lover-like way; that was proper enough while she was free to

bestow her heart and hand upon him. But she stifled the reproaches of the inward monitor, and went on in the evil course that must end in sorrow and shame.

But O'Rourke had a purpose in coming there aside from his passion for her and wish to obtain the money paid him for his work. He was in Bangs's employ still, though in a new capacity.

"I've a little job on hand that mabbe you cud help me wid, me jewel," he said to Belinda one evening in the second week of his stay.

"What's that?" she asked, looking up from her sewing in some surprise and apprehension.

"Nothin' to fright ye," he returned, laughing. "It's jist this, me darlint. There's a gintleman as wants to foind out, fer some raison o' his own, if yer ould man's got a margage—I belave that's what they call it—on Lakeside, the farm belongin' till the Heaths."

"How should I know if he has?" she returned. "He never tells me nothin' about his business, and I don't know what a margage is."

"It's a paper wid writin' onto it, darlint, and one as it wudn't be o' no use at all at all to take," he explained; "not till me nor the gintleman I was spakin' av, though mabbe it moight fer the folks it's drawed against."

"Would you know it if you saw it?"

"Sorra a bit, jewel, but ye wad; ye can rade writin'."

"Yes; but I tell you I don't know what sort of a thing it is."

"Somethin' loike this jist—tellin' that money's owed on the farm, an' if it ain't paid by sich a toime, the feller what holds the margage can sell 'em out and git his money."

"Then anybody that had the paper could do that, couldn't he?" she asked, with increasing interest.

"No, not if he stole it, the gintleman tould me; the writin's got to be fixed to suit, wid the roight name ontil it. He'll be afther buyin' it, I belave, whin he foinds out all about it; an' he'll pay me a purty penny if I foind out an' let him intil the sacret."

"But what made him think it was here?"

"Well, a friend o' his'n see the ould man over there, an' somethin' put it intil her head as it moight be he wuz afther money, the folks seemin' kind o' distressed loike."

Mr. Himes's return broke off the conversation, but it was renewed by Phelim at the first opportunity, and at length Belinda was prevailed upon to promise to make an examination of her husband's papers if she could in any way manage to get possession of the key to the strong box in which they were kept. This key he carried on his person during the day and put carefully under his pillow at night. She had never been permitted to touch it, nor did it seem likely she ever would be.

But one day, having torn his coat, he brought it to her to mend.

"Mind you do it right away," he said, "for I'll have to wear my Sunday one till it's done. I can't chop wood in that, so I'll just step over to Harkness's to ask what cord wood's a sellin' fer now in Prairieville."

Dropping the coat the moment the door closed on him, Belinda ran to the front window and watched him stealthily as he crossed the yard and went out at the gate; then, hurrying back, she searched the pockets of the coat.

Yes, the key was there. She drew it out with a gleeful laugh. There was nothing she enjoyed with a keener relish than prying into whatever he particularly desired to keep secret from her. First satisfying herself that he had not discovered his loss and turned back to retrieve it, she hastened to make use of this "lucky chance."

It so happened that the first paper she opened proved to be the one she was in search of. She read enough to make sure of that, gloated for several minutes over rolls of bank-notes and piles of gold and silver coin, feeling strongly tempted to help herself; but deterred by the almost certain conviction that her husband knew to a cent how much was there, she hurriedly shut down the lid, relocked the box, and went back to her work.

Well for her that she did; for scarcely had

she taken the first stitch in the garment when the old man rushed in in breathless haste and snatched it from her hands.

"What's that for?" she asked, her black eyes snapping.

"Have ye been makin' free with this?" he demanded, shaking the key in her face. "It'll not be good for ye if ye have."

"With that?" she cried, in well-feigned surprise. "I only wish I'd knowed it was there. But if you jerk my work out o' my hands agin, ye may do yer mendin' yerself."

He started upon his errand a second time, and only waiting until he was well out of sight, she threw a shawl over her head and ran to the wood, where Phelim's axe was descending with ringing strokes upon a fallen tree. They ceased at her approach.

"What is it?" he asked; "have ye come til me fer purtection from that ould brute baste?"

"No," she answered, with a scornful laugh, "he hasn't got so far as to strike me yet."

Then she went on to tell of her chance opportunity; how she had improved it, and the discovery she had made.

"Good! good!" he cried, his eyes gleaming with satisfaction and with greed. "But ye're sure now the margage is on the Heath property?"

"Yes; certain sure. You'll not get me into trouble about it?"

"Niver a bit, me darlint. And so that's where the ould divil kapes his money, is it? How much do ye s'pose he has there?"

"I didn't dare look," she answered, evasively, "and he'll take good care I don't never get hold o' that key again. You may count on that. Now I must run back and do that mendin' afore he gits home."

She flew back to the house and worked with nervous haste; the mending must be done before her husband's return, lest his suspicions should be aroused. She had just completed her task, thrown the coat over a chair-back and set about getting supper, when he came in.

He gave her a sharp, suspicious glance, and passed on into the next room, where the strong-box was. He had been thinking on his homeward walk that perhaps she had found and made use of the key in those few minutes that it was out of his possession.

He would find out, he said to himself, and if a dollar of his precious store were missing, he would demand its instant return. Fortunately she could not have had time and opportunity to spend it.

Belinda awaited with a quaking heart the result of his examination. What if she had unwittingly disarranged the papers! What might he not do to her in his fury if such were the case!

It seemed a long while that he was there.

Evidently he must be counting his money. How glad she was that she had resisted the temptation to take a little! At last he came out with a satisfied, triumphant look that banished her fears.

Early the next week Phelim O'Rourke returned to Prairieville, the time of his engagement with Mr. Himes having expired.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHY! why! why! what's the meaning of all this?" cried Mr. Himes, in tones of mingled anger, amazement, and rebuke; "did you actually go to bed leaving this outside door open, Belindy?"

It was early in the morning, some two or three weeks after the events related in our last chapter, and the two had but just risen to begin the new day.

"Me? Of course not!" returned the wife, in indignant surprise not unmingled with fright, running out, only half dressed as she was, to find her husband standing on the kitchen hearth, gazing in open-mouthed astonishment at the wide-open door.

He turned angrily upon her. "You must have done it; you was the last to go to bed."

"Ketch me at it!" she said. "I'm too much afraid o' them burglars by a great deal."

"Burglars!" he echoed, and rushed wildly into the adjoining room. The lid of his strong-box was raised, papers were scattered about the floor. He seemed unable to believe the evidence of his senses; he rubbed his hand across his forehead, muttering, "I must be

dreamin'. Nobody couldn't never have broke that lock, nor picked it neither, and—"

He stepped to the box and stooped over it for a moment; then, straightening himself, turned toward his wife a face from which every vestige of color had fled.

"It's gone!" he gasped; "every cent of it!"

"How much?" she asked, trembling and distressed.

"All I had; the earnin's and savin's o' years and years o' hard work!"

"Why didn't you put it into the bank?"

"Because I was afeard o' them; banks breaks now and agin, and they're often robbed, too, by folks inside and out; nobody knows who's honest and who isn't. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

He began picking up the papers and restoring them to their places, groaning and lamenting all the time, and even shedding tears.

"How quiet they must a done it all!" she said, shuddering, and glancing about, half expecting to see a burglar. "I never heard a sound. And they must have been in our room to get the key!" she exclaimed, with a fresh accession of fright at the thought.

"No, they wasn't!" he said, sharply. "Can't you see the lock's broke?"

At that she walked back to the kitchen, closed the outer door, started the fire, and put the kettle on to boil, her thoughts all the while

busy with their loss and the manner in which the robbery had been effected. She knew no more of it than he did. Phelim had not confided in her, and as yet she had no suspicion of his connection with the band of housebreakers and thieves infesting the valley.

The old man was so full of grief and despair that he could not eat; leaving his breakfast almost untasted, and bidding his wife attend to the outdoor work, which he usually did himself, he mounted his swiftest horse and hastened to the nearest town to see what steps could be taken toward the recovery of his stolen property.

But as before, when committing similar acts of depredation, the wily villains had managed their work so adroitly that no clew to their identity could be found.

Weeks passed on without any new light being thrown upon the matter, and under the grievous trial Mr. Himes grew constantly more morose, captious and niggardly toward his wife, till she declared that life spent alone with him—and she seldom had any other companion —was an intolerable burden.

Then he took to absenting himself frequently, sometimes being gone all day long, never telling her whither he went or on what errand.

At length he announced his intention to sell his place and move into an adjoining State.

"What fer?" Belinda asked, in surprise and

dismay. "You couldn't get a nicer place, and you've always bragged on it so. I'd never have thought you'd give it up."

"There's nothin' wrong with the place," he said, "but there's too many burglars about. I sha'n't stay here to be robbed agin soon as I get a little ahead."

"You'll stay on here till after harvest, won't you?"

"I tell you, I'm a goin' jest as soon's I kin sell out!" he snapped.

Spring had opened, and the farmers were very busy. Once Mr. Himes would have been as much so as any, but now he seemed to feel that he had something else to attend to of more importance than the cultivation of his land.

Miriam Heath, out in the fields one bright morning with Sandy McAllister and Barney Nolan, overseeing and directing their operations there, heard aloud "Halloo, Miss Heath!" and turning her head, saw Mr. Himes waving his hand to her from the road.

"I must see what he wants," she said to Sandy, whose attention had been arrested by the call as well as her own. "I think you can go on very well without me now." And turning her horse about, she rode up to the fence that separated the field from the road, and with a courteous greeting to her caller, asked if he would go into the house.

"Well, yes; p'r'aps I might as well," he re-

plied, "if you can spare time fer a little business talk."

"I must always do that," she answered. "I was very sorry to hear, some time ago, that you, too, had been robbed."

"Yes," he returned, with a heavy sigh; "and them rascals made a bigger haul than they did here—got the savin's o' years. I hain't much left but the farm and the stock. I hope you've got your notes back, Miss Heath. Fact is, I want that money awful bad now. I'd be glad if you'd pay the whole thing off, principal and interest, and take up your mortgage."

"I wish I could, indeed," she said, leading the way into the house and giving him a chair, "but it is utterly impossible. We have had no trace of the notes yet; and though we have used the closest economy, I have but one hundred dollars for you now. I will give you a check on the Prairieville bank for it."

"Only a hundred! Why, that will leave fifty back of the interest due last fall—six months ago!"

"I know it," she said, with a deeply troubled look; "but if you will only have patience, I am sure we will pay it all in time."

"I don't want to be hard on ye, but, as I said afore, I do want that money awful bad," he answered, with a scowl. "I mean to leave the State, and I'm tryin' to close things up so's to take all I have with me."

"Have we not always paid you the interest promptly up to last fall?" she asked.

"Yes, that's so."

"And can't you trust us to send it to you as fast as we can raise it?"

"Well, I reckon likely ye'd do it, but I'd a heap rather take it all with me. I don't want to be hard on ye," he repeated, "and I should hate to foreclose; but I do want the money mighty bad."

Miriam's cheek had grown very pale. "Oh, Mr. Himes," she said, clasping her hands entreatingly, "you wouldn't do that? You couldn't have the heart to do it—to take all we have and turn us out of house and home?"

"I'd hate to do it, but every man must look to his own interests first and foremost."

"Do you remember," she said, low and huskily, "that it was to save the country my father borrowed this money and mortgaged his farm to you? and he gave his life to the cause; my brother gave his health and strength and the use of his arm; and what would your property be worth to-day if the country had gone to ruin?"

"Well, maybe not much," he acknowledged after a moment's cogitation, leaning forward with his eyes on the floor, his hat in his hands and his elbows on his knees, "and I shouldn't like to distress ye. Give me the check for the hundred, and I'll wait a spell for the rest.

You're a girl in a thousand, Miss Miriam, and I hope you'll pull through all right yet."

"Thank you," she said, a little tremulously; "if I do not, it shall not be for lack of trying. Thank you for your forbearance, Mr. Himes. You shall have all I can possibly save this year, and if the crops are good, that will be all the interest and a large part of the principal. Indeed, if we recover the stolen notes I dare hope to pay off the whole this year."

He went away with the comfortable feeling that he had shown himself a model of generous forbearance, and was deserving of any amount of good fortune in requital of it all.

"You can just pass that over to my credit, I don't care to draw it out to-day," he said, as he handed in the check at the bank.

As he was stepping into the street again, he felt a tap on his shoulder, a voice asking, at the same time, "How are you to-day, Mr. Himes?"

"Ah! good-day, colonel; how are you?" he returned, looking round.

"I want a little chat with you on business," said Bangs, offering his hand with an urbane smile. "Just step over to my office with me, won't you?"

"You hain't got on the track o' them thieves, hev ye?" queried Himes, half incredulously, half eagerly, as they walked on together. "But I s'pose there hain't no such good news."

"I wish I could say there was," was the

gracious reply ; " but they are cunning rogues, though we may promise ourselves that they're sure to be caught finally. No ; it's another matter I want to speak of to-day. Just step in and take a chair. I hear you were offering your farm for sale. Have you found a purchaser yet ?"

Himes answered in the negative.

" Well, I have a little money to invest, and don't know but I might as well put it into land."

Questions and answers followed—as to the size of the farm, buildings on it, quality of land, number of acres under cultivation, etc.

" Well, I must ride out and look at it before I can strike a bargain with you," the lawyer said at length. " But haven't you some other property for sale—railroad or other stock ? mortgages ?"

" Yes, sir ; I have a mortgage that I'd like mightily to get the cash for," returned Himes, catching at the suggestion with unmistakable avidity.

Bangs's eyes shone ; he saw Miriam in his power. " On what property ?" he asked, knowing full well what the answer would be.

" Lakeside—the Heaths' place. It's a nice one."

" Yes, I know it, and wouldn't mind having a claim on it. First mortgage ? and what's the amount ?"

"Yes, first—no other on it, fer's I know; and it's for two thousand dollars."

"Interest all paid up?"

Himes shook his head; then went on to tell exactly how matters stood between the Heaths and himself.

"I'll take it, and pay every cent down. Have you it with you?"

"No; it's at home. I'll bring it in to-morrow; that'll be best, as I'll want to put the money in bank for the present," returned Himes, meditatively. "I don't put no more in the way o' them burglars, you see; guess they wouldn't find it as easy to break into the bank as into my house. But—"

He stopped short, and seemed ill at ease.

"What now?" asked Bangs.

"Why, you see, I was just a thinkin' I wouldn't like them folks—the Heaths—to be foreclosed on and sold out. I kind o' promised Miss Miriam to wait on 'em a bit, and she's a girl in—"

"You needn't be afraid to trust them to me," smiled Bangs, graciously. "Why, to let you into a secret"—he leaned over and whispered the rest into the farmer's ear—"I expect to marry the girl."

"You do? Well, all I've got to say is, you'll get a mighty handsome woman and a first-rate housekeeper and manager."

"I know all that better than anybody can tell it to me," returned Bangs, emphatically.

CHAPTER X.

ONE lovely afternoon early in May two persons, a man and a woman, sat side by side on a log in the wood that formed a part of the Himes place.

"Did iver I hear the loike o' that!" he exclaimed, with a long, low whistle, in response to something she had been telling him. "He must be crazier nor a loon! goin' down the river on a raft wid all his goods aboard. And the money, too, did yees say, me darlint?"

"I don't know, but I suppose so; he's goin' to buy land as soon as he gets there. He's sold the farm here."

"And the margage on Lakeside," he supplemented, nodding his head knowingly.

"Has he? How did you find that out? He never told me a breath about it," she returned in some surprise.

"Ah, thin," he chuckled, "sure there's a bit av a burrud that whispers things intil Phalim O'Rourke's ears whan it's av impoortance fer him to know about 'em."

"Is that so?" she asked, with a slight laugh. "But how does that margage concern you?"

"Ah, that's me sacret; but sure, the ould

man's affairs consarn me, seein' that a good bet o' his money'll be comin' till you whan he's out o' the way under the turuf."

"I wish he was there now!" she cried, bursting into sudden passion. "I haven't the first bit of comfort in my life for thinkin' I'm tied to him, and he growlin' and scoldin' from mornin' to night, and wantin' me to go dressed like a beggar. I don't never have a cent but what I get by sellin' milk and eggs, and that won't hardly keep me in shoes and stockin's."

"S'pose, thin, we put 'im out o' the way," he whispered, bending down to look into her eyes, a lurid light of hate, malice, and revenge gleaming in his own.

She shrank back shuddering, a sudden death-like pallor overspreading her cheek. "You can't mean it!" she said, in a hoarse whisper; "you're only jokin'!"

"Niver a bit av it!" he ejaculated, with an oath. "Didn't he stale you from me? an' whan I heard it, didn't I swear to shoot him down in his tracks loike a dog? An' whan he's afloat on his raft—crazy ould fool that he is!—there'll be the wather at hand quite convanient to tumble him intil, out o' sight."

"No! no! no!" she cried, recoiling still further, covering her face with her hands, and shuddering with horror. "I hate him! I hate him! but—that would be murder!" she added, with a gasp, "and we'd be hung for it—both of us."

"No; no hangin' in this State!" he said, a ring of savage triumph in his tones. "And dead men don't tell no tales."

Mr. Himes had gone from home that day; there was no danger of his return for some hours, and the interview in the wood did not come to an end till near the time when he might be expected.

Before that the wily villain had, by blandishments, coaxings, entreaties, appeals to her love for himself, highly colored pictures of the happy life they might lead together were she but free to marry him, as she had promised to before he went away to the war, and artful allusions to Himes's brutal treatment of her, succeeded in extracting a half-reluctant consent from Belinda to the robbery and murder of her husband.

She still declared, shudderingly, that she could not and would not take any active part in it, but promised not to warn him of his danger or put any obstacle in the way of the design upon his property and life.

The old farmer, bent on saving the expense of travel and transportation of goods by rail, had determined to make a raft of sufficient size to carry himself, wife, household furniture and farming implements, and on that descend the river.

In vain neighbors and friends had warned him of perils from natural obstructions in the

channel of the stream and danger from burglars by night, when, because of those obstructions, he would be compelled to moor his raft to the shore. By nature headstrong and opinionated, he held fast to his purpose.

He would need help in making the raft ; had not yet engaged it ; for at this time of year, when there was so much farm work to be done, it was scarce.

Phelim now proposed to offer his services and those of one or two " friends" on very reasonable terms. When the raft was completed and had received its load, one or more of them would be needed to assist in its navigation, he said, and that would render the commission of his contemplated crime a very easy matter some dark night, when they were moored to the shore in a lonely spot, and the old man had fallen asleep.

To Belinda's terrified objection that she might be suspected of complicity, he answered, " Niver a bit o't, me darlint ; whaniver ye see the thing started ye'll be off loike the wind to bring help, sure. But the nearest house'll be a mile away annyhow, an' ye'll not be called upon to kill yersilf wid runnin' ; ye'll presently go a bit asier ; an' we'll mak quick wurruk an' be off wid the money, lavin' the ould divil in a state not to moind his loss afore ye kin git back wid yer hilp. And thin, whan yees sees what's happened till him, ye'll mak a tirrible cryin' an'

lamentation, an' sure they'll think you're heart-broke intirely."

At length the two separated; Belinda went back to the house to get supper ready against her husband's return, and Phelim, plunging into the woods, made a circuit of a mile or so, and striking into the highroad, met Himes riding slowly homeward.

The old man hung his head with a dejected air, as one whose plans and purposes had miscarried.

"Good avenin', sor," said Phelim, lifting his hat as they passed.

Himes started and turned his head, for the Irishman was already somewhat in his rear.

"Hollo! is that you, O'Rourke?" he called. "Come back, will you? I want a word with you."

Phelim was at his horse's side in an instant, asking, "What's your wull, sor?"

"I've a job on hand, and want help with it; could you come and take a hand at it for a day or two?"

"Sure, sor, if I knowed what it was I cud aisier tell that same."

"It's the making of a raft over yonder on the river-bank; 'twon't take much knowledge beyond how to wield an axe and hammer in nails, and ye're not wantin' in that or in strength."

"Well, sor, I'll drame on it the night an' lat yees know in the mornin'," Phelim answered, turning to go.

"Wait a minute," Himes said. "If ye can bring one or two more fellows with you, it'll be all the better; we'll get through the sooner, and that'll suit me first-rate, for I'm gettin' in a big hurry to be off."

"Where, sor, if I may be so bould?"

"Down the river, clear out o' this State, where the laws are not severe enough on burglars and cut-throats to make honest folks feel that their lives and property are tolerable safe."

"Thin, sor, beggin' yer pardin fer the liberty, ye'd betther kape it close that yer manin' to thravel in sich a unpertected manner."

"Of course you needn't blab about it; but I'll have a loaded revolver, and if the rascals come, I'll show them that I know how to protect myself."

"Gettin' in a big hurry, indade!" chuckled Phelim, as he trudged on again. "He don't know what fer."

There was a meeting of the band of villains that night, when all was arranged for the carrying out of O'Rourke's atrocious designs upon the old farmer.

The next morning, as Himes and his wife rose from the breakfast-table, a big, burly German presented himself before the open kitchen door.

"Goot tay, mynheer," he said, touching his cap; "I vas shoost looking for a chob ov vork,

to makes te monish to pay for de wittles and de clo'es. I vil do anytings you vil haf to be tun."

Himes asked a few questions as to his qualifications for the work of raft-making and the wages he expected, and receiving satisfactory replies, engaged him at once.

As Himes stepped out into the dooryard, having directed the new-comer to take a seat at the table, and Belinda set his breakfast before him, a sly wink let her into the secret that here was one of the accomplices of the would-be assassin of her husband.

She started, and turned pale ; but averting her eyes, went on silently with her work, though her heart beat fast with terror and was heavy with remorse, yet not with a repentance that would lead her to draw back, ere it was too late, from her promised share in the commission of the fearful crime.

Her heart did relent more than once during the intervening time, and she was again and again on the point of giving the old man a hint of his danger. But then how to do so without compromising Phelim's safety, and even her own, she could not see ; and besides Himes treated her in the presence of these strange men (for Phelim arrived in the course of the morning, bringing McManus with him) with scorn, contempt, and lordly assumption of authority which deeply humiliated her, and kindled

anew the smouldering fires of hatred and revenge that burned in her breast. There were stolen interviews with Phelim, too, in which he artfully added fuel to the flame, and thus kept her to her resolve.

CHAPTER XI.

AT length all was done—the raft finished, all the goods and chattels belonging to the ill-assorted pair placed upon it, and they fully prepared for their voyage.

It was past noon when they found themselves in this state of readiness, and the question was raised whether it would not be the wiser plan to remain where they were until morning, and begin the journey with the new day.

Kindly offers of hospitable entertainment were made by more than one neighbor, but Mr. Himes refused to consent to the least delay. They could travel several miles before sundown, he said, and it would be just so much gained.

This suited the conspirators exactly. McManus had been engaged to assist in propelling the raft; he would see that it was moored for the night at a spot which they had selected as well fitted to be the scene of their intended crime—a lonely and secluded place some six or seven miles down the river.

Belinda stumbled in stepping aboard, and had nearly fallen into the water.

"The very awkwardest critter I ever see!"

was the sneering remark of her husband, as he caught her by the arm and saved her from a wetting.

Phelim, standing near, muttered a curse under his breath, but the woman bore the rebuke in silence. A vision of her reprover lying there stiff and stark, with fast glazing eyes and gray hairs all dabbled in blood, seemed to come before her, and she had no heart to resent his unkindness—could scarce refrain even now from shrieking out to him to beware of these men, for they were seeking his life.

She sat pale and trembling while they loosed from the shore and dropped slowly down the stream, McManus laughing and exchanging coarse jests with his intended victim, while his two accomplices waved their hats, cheered the departing voyagers, and shouting good-bye, turned and walked rapidly away in the direction of the highroad.

Belinda followed them with her eyes till distance and intervening trees shut out the sight; then, utterly oblivious of everything but her own guilty, miserable thoughts and fears, dropped her face into her hands with a shudder and a sigh that was half a moan.

"Frettin' arter that there handsome young Irishman, be ye, eh?" sneered Himes's voice close at her side. "Well, ye needn't; ye won't never see him no more. I begun to suspect, this last day or two, that ye had most too big a

likin' fer each other, and I'll look out that he don't git near ye again."

She made no reply, nor even lifted her head; and after regarding her a moment with silent scorn, he walked away to the other side of the raft.

Subsequently he twitted her several times on her excessive pallor, her silence and abstraction, attributing them to the fright of her narrow escape from falling into the river, and telling her she was an arrant coward, even for a woman.

"Oh, do let me alone!" she said at length, wearily. "You seem determined to make me hate the very sight of you, the very sound of your voice."

"And what do I care if you do?" he returned, with a mocking laugh; "you can't get away from me, and I ain't afeard o' you."

"Go away! go away!" she cried, covering her ears with her hands and turning her back upon him, while she shuddered from head to foot and her face grew ghastly in the dim light, for the sun had set and darkness was slowly creeping over the earth.

He lighted his pipe, turned from her with an air of supreme indifference, and passing around to the farther side of the rude cabin, which occupied the centre of the raft, sat down for the smoke with which he was accustomed to finish the day, little dreaming that it might be his last.

She sat where he had left her, with her elbows on her knees, her face in her hands, her mind in a tumult of horror, fear, and remorse, mingled with an intense hatred and disgust toward him, the man to whose destiny she had voluntarily linked her own for life.

But she could not contemplate without a shudder the cruel fate awaiting him. "Why should he be slain?" she asked herself. Phelim wanted her and the money; let him take both and carry them away, but spare the old man's life—spare himself the staining of his hands with innocent blood. The crime would be great enough without that.

The raft was now moored to the shore. She lifted her head. How quiet everything was! not a sound to break the almost oppressive stillness save the slight ripple of the water at her feet, and the evening song of the frogs. There was not a house, road, fence, or any other sign of man's occupancy within sight, but on the top of a slope not far away a solitary figure stood out in relief against the sky for a single instant, then vanished. They were there waiting for—what? To murder an innocent old man in his sleep, and possess themselves of his hard-earned savings.

Some one drew cautiously near and touched her on the shoulder.

"The byes is there," whispered McManus, "an' ye mustn't be afther betrayin' us. I was

feart more'n oncet yer white face an' shakin' hands ud give 'im warnin'. Ye know we ain't a goin' to harrum ye—no, niver a bit av it. He thrates ye loike a brute baste, he does, the raskil ; but Phalim ull be good till ye, an' mak' ye a rich lady wan o' these days. I'm a goin' to lie down and slape a bit, an' ye'd betther thry the same, fer they'll not be comin' till toward mornin', whan folks slapes the soundest. Ye'll moind ye don't do nothin' to rouse the ould man's suspicions !"

"I hate him ! You may trust me," she answered, in low, husky tones, without lifting her head or looking round.

He went away, and again she was left to the companionship of her own thoughts. Conscience was loud in its upbraidings. What was she doing ? What would be the end of all this ? Even should she escape the strong hand of the law, would not the spectre of the old man with his gray locks all dabbled in blood haunt her all her life ?

And he had been good to her once—before she alienated his affections by her slatternly, careless ways and indifference to his comfort.

She could not look upon his death ; she must make an effort to save him, but without betraying his would-be assassins. She rose and crept around to the place where he sat. She crouched at his side.

"Don't let us stay here to-night," she said,

in a hoarse whisper ; " let us go ashore and get lodging in some house. You have money, and those burglars may have got a hint of it ; they always do find out somehow, and they may come on us in the night and—"

He interrupted her. " There ! I knowed ye was a coward ; but I'm not. Let 'em come. I'm ready for 'em."

She drew away from him in discouragement and disgust. Where was the use of trying to save so besotted a fool—one who seemed bent on his own destruction ? If he perished that night by the hand of violence, it would not be her fault. She had done all she could ; for any further effort, any plainer speech would expose herself to suspicion and violence from him.

She went back to her former station on the other side of the raft, and resuming the old posture, with her elbows on her knees and her face in her hands, tried to steel herself to the coming fate of the man who was so persistently abusive to her.

But in vain ; it was too horrible ; and she could not forget that she had consented to it. Yet what more could she do ? Ah ! could she herself rob him before the burglars came, and steal away with the money to Phelim, he surely would consent to run away with her and it, and leave the old dotard his life. Surely it would be much the better plan for all ; but how to accomplish it ? for Himes had his money

in a belt which he wore day and night about his waist.

He had finished his pipe, and she heard him retire to the cabin. When she thought sufficient time had elapsed for him to be sound asleep she crept softly in and stretched herself by his side—for the last time! Oh, what an awaking his would be! She could not sleep; her heart beat almost to suffocation, and she trembled like an aspen leaf.

At length, when his perfect stillness and regular breathing seemed to speak of profound slumber, she cautiously put out her hand and touched the belt.

He started up instantly, asking, with an oath, "What's that fer? what are ye after? would ye dare to rob me?"

"No; why should I? ain't I your wife?" she asked, bitterly. "But I want you to take it off and hide it somewhere. You'd better lose yer money than it and yer life too. If they come they'll have it at all costs; and if it's on you, they'll kill you to get it."

"'Twon't be no great loss to you if they do; you'd like to be a gay young widder—you needn't deny it," he said, with a sneer. "I'll resk it, anyhow; and don't you touch my belt agin."

It was her last effort to save him. Oh, how long the hours seemed while she waited! yet how gladly she would have detained them in

their flight, that thus the coming of the dreaded event might be retarded.

She had at last fallen into a doze when a hand touched her, and Phelim's voice whispered in her ear, "Go! lave the ould divil to us; we'll take care o' 'im. Run an' give the alarum, but don't ye be in too big a hurry."

She was on her feet before he had finished his sentence. Himes, too, had roused and started up. She heard the two grapple with oaths and curses as she dashed out of the cabin through the midst of a group of dark forms that stepped aside to let her pass, and sprang ashore.

She ran a few paces, then paused for breath, pressing her hand upon her wildly beating heart. Her husband's voice came to her in an agonized shriek: "Help! help! murder! murder!" with it the sharp report of a pistol, and echoing the cry, she sped onward, fear, horror, and remorse quickening her flight.

CHAPTER XII.

AT the time of the breaking out of the war for the Union, Warren Charlton was a rising young lawyer in Fairfield, a town situated, like Prairieville, in Wild River Valley, but some miles farther up the stream. On his return from the war he had established himself in Prairieville, much to the disgust and ire of Bangs, who looked upon Charlton as a dangerous rival in business, as also in love ; and he was proving himself such, building up a fine and lucrative practice there and in the surrounding country.

Some of his old clients still preferred him to his successors in Fairfield, and when they had important business requiring legal advice, would come to or send for him to attend to it.

And Dr. Jasper, having attained to the reputation of being the most skilful physician and surgeon in all that region of country, was not infrequently summoned thither, and to other like distant points, in cases of severe sickness or serious accident.

On the morning of the day that saw the embarkation of Mr. and Mrs. Himes, both these gentlemen had received an urgent call to the vicinity of Fairfield. A man of property had

been thrown from his carriage and seriously injured. His recovery was doubtful, and a will was to be made, while at the same time every effort put forth to save his life.

The town was not on the line of the railroad, nor was the residence of Mr. Connor, the injured man. It lay beyond Fairfield and near the river. So the two gentlemen drove over together.

They found the patient dangerously hurt, but in full possession of his mental powers. Physician and lawyer were in attendance upon him together or by turns through the remainder of that day and the following night.

Toward morning he slept under the influence of an opiate administered to deaden the sense of pain. Then the doctor withdrew from the room, leaving him in the care of his wife and daughter, and passing out upon the front porch, joined the captain, who was slowly pacing it to and fro.

"Any change?" Charlton asked, stopping in his walk.

"Yes, for the better; I have strong hope that he will recover. How are you progressing with your work?"

"I have finished; nothing is wanting now but Mr. Connor's signature."

"I think he will be able to add it when he wakes," the doctor said; "he is sleeping now. Hark! what was that?"

"A pistol shot and a cry for help!" exclaimed the captain. "It came from the direction of the river, did it not? Some one is, perhaps, in deadly peril. Let us go to the rescue. I have a loaded revolver on the table in the room yonder. It's hardly safe to be without one in these times of continual burglaries."

"No; I carry one constantly in travelling about the country roads," the doctor said; and as the words left his lips two young men belonging to the family came rushing out, excitedly, but with care to make no noise.

"Did you gentlemen hear that shot and cry for help?" they asked, one of them adding, "That band of burglars is after old Himes and his money, I'm afraid. I heard he'd started down the river on a raft and moored for the night about half a mile below here."

There was a hasty consultation and gathering up of weapons; then the four set off on a run for the river, intending to follow its course till they should reach the probable scene of conflict.

But before they had traversed half the distance a woman came rushing wildly toward them, shrieking for help.

"Who? where? what?" they asked.

"Mr. Himes—my husband!" she panted. "Oh, make haste! they're killing him!"

"Show us the way," said Dr. Jasper; "lead on, and we'll follow."

She turned and retraced her steps, almost flying over the ground, so that they had some difficulty in keeping up with her.

Day was faintly dawning in the east, and as they neared the spot they could see the outlines of the raft where it lay on the water, then several dark figures leap ashore from it and flee swiftly in a direction opposite to that from which they were approaching.

One of the young men sent a shot after them, but without effect, the light being insufficient for certain aim. All was darkness and silence on the raft.

"Oh, we're too late! they've killed him!" exclaimed Belinda, with a hysterical sob.

"Perhaps not," said the doctor, stepping cautiously aboard, the others following. "Can you get a light?"

"There was a candle and matches on a shelf in the cabin there, close to the door," she answered, in a shaking voice. "Get them yourselves; I can't go in there to look at—"

"No need; here they are," he said, in a low, excited tone, having already stepped to the door and laid his hand upon them.

He struck a match, lighted the candle, and glanced about the tiny apartment, the other men pressing up behind him and looking over his shoulder.

A shudder ran through the little group, and a low exclamation of horror burst from the lips

of the young Connors ; but the doctor and the captain, inured to scenes of blood and carnage by their experiences in the late war, viewed this one in awed silence. Yet only for an instant.

"Life may not be extinct!" exclaimed the doctor, hastily setting down the light and stooping over the prostrate, bleeding, and apparently lifeless form of the old man.

Belinda, lingering on the outside of the group, overheard the words with strangely mingled relief and terror. To think that he had been murdered was so horrible ; yet if he were still alive and should recover consciousness and the power of speech ! Ah, who could tell how much he knew or would be able to reveal of her complicity in the crime ? Trembling and half fainting with fright she clutched at the wall of the cabin to keep from falling.

Her first impulse was to flee ; but a second thought told her that would but confirm the suspicion of her guilt, were such once set afloat, while if she remained and bore herself with an air of innocence, the fact that she had promptly summoned assistance would be strong evidence in her favor.

She dropped down upon the floor, and leaning her head against the wall, listened intently for further sounds from within, though her heart was beating so loud that it seemed as if she could hear nothing else.

"He lives! he is reviving!" were the next words that reached her ear after what had seemed hours of waiting, though in reality but a very few moments had passed.

Then the old man spoke, feebly, tremulously, but quite distinctly. "He thought he'd finished me, the scoundrel! Run, somebody, and catch him! It's Phelim O'Rourke; he's robbed me! he's got it all!" feeling for the belt he had worn about his waist. "And she—she's hand and glove with him—curse her! take her too, and let the law deal with 'em both!"

"Who?" asked one of the bystanders.

"B'lindy—my Judas of a wife! She's betrayed me into the hands o' them burglars."

He paused, panting for breath, while the doctor said, soothingly, "I think you are mistaken. She has saved your life by bringing us here to your aid."

"Humph!" grunted the old man, incredulously. Then, impatiently, and struggling to rise, "Why don't ye run and ketch the robbers, some o' ye? they'll git away with every cent I had."

"It shall be attended to," said the doctor; "but you must stop talking, if you want to live to bring them to justice."

"I'm off after the sheriff and a posse of men to pursue them as fast as possible!" cried one of the young men, springing ashore.

His brother was about to follow, but the doc-

tor detained him. "We must have help to carry Mr. Himes to some place where he can have the care and nursing he is likely to need for days or weeks to come."

"He'll have to be taken on a litter?"

"Yes, certainly; he is too weak for any other mode of conveyance."

"I'll see to it; I'll have two or three more men here before I'm an hour older, or my name's not Bob Connor!" and away he sped toward the town.

Charlton stepped out from the cabin, leaving Dr. Jasper alone with the wounded man.

At the sound of his step Belinda lifted her head. "Is there anything I can do to help, sir?" she asked, in a shaking voice.

"I think not," he replied; "and I should judge it best for you to keep out of his sight for a while, as the excitement of seeing you might prove injurious."

"Yes, I s'pose so," she said, gloomily, and averting her face. "Where'll he be took to?"

"The tavern in Fairfield, I presume; I know of no more suitable place—do you?"

"No; we hain't got no home no more. I told him 'twas a fool thing to sell it; but of course he thought I didn't know nothin'; but if he'd done as I said, this awful thing wouldn't never a happened."

"No, I presume not; and I think myself it was a foolhardy thing to attempt to go down

the river in this way, particularly with such a sum of money on board, and in the face of the fact that so many burglaries have been committed in the neighborhood of late."

"I wisht he a been wiser," she sighed, dropping her face into her hands; "but I'll nurse him out o' this ov he'll let me."

The captain suggested that she could at least gather up his clothing and such other things as would be needed for his comfort while ill.

She said she would stay behind and do so when they carried him away, then follow to the hotel with the things; she knew the way quite well.

"You were by when the attack was made?" Charlton presently remarked, interrogatively. "I hope you may be able to testify to the identity of the would-be murderers?"

She started and trembled afresh. "I—I didn't see one o' their faces," she said. "How could I? 'twas dark as pitch."

"O'Rourke was employed by Mr. Himes for several weeks, I know; and you may have been able to recognize his voice."

"He—I mean the fellar that come in the cabin where we was sleepin'—didn't say a word, only grabbed Himes—to git a holt o' the belt he kep' his money in, I s'pose—and Himes he begun to screech murder! an' I cut an' run fer help hard as ever I could," she said, in a sullen tone. "He kin say whatsomever he's a mind to; I hadn't nothin' to do with the affair."

"I hope not, indeed," returned the captain; "and I trust you will be ready to do what you can to bring the scoundrels to justice."

She made no response to that, but presently rose and went around to the other side of the raft, where she remained out of sight till the wounded man had been carried away.

The town, situated a mile or more farther up the river, could be reached by traversing half that distance by land. Taking that route, Mr. Himes's bearers bore him thither, stepping carefully to avoid jolting him.

The news of the attack upon him had spread like wildfire, and early as was the hour, the streets were full of people—men, women, and children—eager to catch a glimpse of his features as he was carried past, and to learn every particular of the affair. Many of them, falling into line behind the litter, followed it to the outer door of the tavern, and would have even pressed into the room to which he was finally taken had not the doctor positively forbidden it and resolutely shut the door in their faces.

All was still excitement in and about the building when the stage from Frederic drove up.

"Stop here for breakfast," the driver called out, laconically, to his passengers as he reined in his horses and sprang to the ground. Then holding the lines in one hand, he opened the door of the stage with the other.

Several men alighted, one of them hailing the landlord :

"Hello, Strong, what's up?"

"Why, hello, Smith! how d'y do?" returned mine host, stepping briskly forward and shaking hands. "Glad to see you. But haven't ye heard the news? Old Farmer Himes, simpleton that he was to be travelling down the river on a raft, was attacked by the burglars last night—or, rather, early this morning I suppose it was—and pretty nigh murdered. Dr. Jasper's been working with him for the last two hours; he's in there now," nodding his head in the direction of the room where the wounded man lay, "but I reckon he'll bring him round."

A stranger standing at Smith's side started slightly at the mention of the doctor's name, and, fixing his eyes on the speaker, listened intently as he went on to give a detailed account of the nature and extent of Himes's hurts, and what had been done for his relief. "Ah, here comes the doc himself!" he exclaimed, pausing in his narrative as a gentleman stepped from the doorway into their midst. "How's your patient, doc?"

"Doing as well as could reasonably be expected, Mr. Strong," returned Dr. Jasper, quietly, but as one in some haste. "Not well enough for me to leave him to-day," he added, "and I must send a telegram to my wife, lest she should be anxious at not seeing me."

"Got it ready, I see," said Strong, noticing that the doctor held a slip of paper in his fingers. "Just give it to me, and I'll have it sent right away. Now walk in to breakfast, gentlemen—all of you; it's on the table, smoking hot."

All this time the stranger had eyed Dr. Jasper askance, and now taking a seat nearly opposite him at the table, he continued to do so during the meal.

The doctor did not seem to perceive the scrutiny to which he was being subjected, but ate as one whose thoughts were preoccupied with something else than his immediate surroundings or the food of which he was partaking.

Naturally the talk at the table ran principally on the startling event of a few hours previous; but the doctor took no part in it, except when directly addressed by remark or query.

Presently the announcement, "Stage for Prairieville leaves in five minutes!" sent several persons, including the stranger who had so persistently eyed the doctor, hurrying out.

Dr. Jasper rose the next moment, and was passing through the hall on his way to his patient, when the driver slammed the door to upon his passengers, the stranger leaning eagerly forward to catch a last glimpse of the physician.

"You appear to take considerable interest in

Dr. Jasper, sir," remarked Smith, eyeing the man with a quizzical look, as the driver vaulted to his elevated seat and took up the reins.

"Yes; I've heard him spoken of," was the reply.

"Nothing bad, I'll venture to say; he's well thought of in these parts," remarked Smith, with emphasis.

But the stranger was gazing from the window, as they whirled rapidly down the street, and paid no attention to the remark.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT was a bright June morning, redolent of the breath of roses and honeysuckle in full bloom, sweet with the songs of birds; and nowhere sweeter or lovelier than at Lakeside, where gentle breezes sighed in the tree-tops and glad sunbeams danced on the waters of the lake.

The grandmother's face expressed placid contentment as she went about her daily round of household duties; Ronald was in almost gay spirits, averring that he had not felt so well at any time before since receiving his wounds; the children were full of mirth and jollity, running hither and thither about the garden and lawn, gathering flowers for the parlor vases, feeding the chickens, hunting eggs in the barn, and doing various little services for the older members of the family. Their sister noticed their efforts with smiles and words of commendation, talked cheerfully, even gayly, to her grandmother and Ronald, and went about attending to her many duties and responsibilities in her usual prompt and energetic fashion; yet her heart was heavy and her cheek pale.

"Miriam, dear child," Mrs. Heath said at length, "you are not well."

"I'm not sick, granny dear," was the smiling rejoinder; "a slight headache is all that ails me, and a walk will relieve it, I think; so, as a few things are wanted from the stores, and I can be spared from the field, I'm going into town."

"That's right," responded her grandmother; "and don't hurry yourself, for it's early, and you'll have plenty of time to walk leisurely—to call on Mrs. Jasper, too; and I wish you would, for we haven't heard or seen anything of her or the doctor for some days."

"I shall if I have time, grandma," replied Miriam, drawing on her gloves—for she had just entered the room attired for her walk. "I am very fond of Serena, as you know, and a talk with her is always a real treat."

She did her errands first, then turned in the direction of Dr. Jasper's pretty vine-covered and rose-embowered cottage.

Serena met her at the door, gave her a warm embrace, and seated her in an arm-chair on the shaded porch, taking another by her side.

At their feet lay the little garden, gay with flowers, that separated the house from the street. Perry was amusing himself there trundling a toy wheelbarrow up and down the walks. He dropped it to run to Miriam to claim a kiss, asking eagerly if Bertie and Olly were coming, too.

"Not to-day, my little man," Miriam said,

bestowing the caress, and keeping her arm about him. "How is little sister?" she asked.

"Oh, dus splendid!" he exclaimed, his dark eyes dancing with pleasure; "her's de nicest 'ittle sister ever was."

"He's very fond of her," Serena remarked, with satisfaction. "And she is a lovely little darling, if her father and mother are competent to judge of her charms," she added, with her low, silvery laugh.

"And am I not to be treated to a sight of her?" asked Miriam, lightly.

"Yes, indeed. She is taking her morning nap; but I think we can take a peep at her ladyship without waking her," Serena said, rising, and leading the way through the hall to the cosey sitting-room beyond, where, in a dainty crib, the babe lay sleeping—a plump, fair, golden-haired, blue-eyed little creature some three months old.

"What a darling!" exclaimed Miriam, half under her breath as the two bent over the little one with eyes full of loving admiration.

"Isn't she? the dear, tiny, helpless thing!" murmured Serena, just touching her lips to the velvet cheek. "Ah, Miriam dear, how happy I am!" she sighed, when they had gone back to the porch and resumed their seats. "I couldn't wish anything better for you than such a wifehood and motherhood as mine: two such darling children, and a husband so tenderly

careful of his wife, so kind and affectionate as mine."

"I am very glad for you, Serena," Miriam said in reply. "I think you have won a prize in the matrimonial lottery; but I can scarcely expect to do so well; therefore, my better plan will be to remain single."

"Oh, no, indeed you must not! I am very sure you can do—perhaps not quite, but very nearly as well, if you choose," returned Serena, with a laughing glance into her friend's face. "He's deeply in love, Mirry; there's no doubt about it; the doctor and I have both seen it for some time past."

"You are talking in riddles," Miriam said, smiling and blushing in spite of herself. Then a look of keen distress came into her face.

"Mirry, you are in trouble," Serena said, taking her friend's hand and squeezing it affectionately in her own. "Tell me what it is, dear, and let me sympathize, and help, too, if I can."

"I came, intending to tell you," faltered Miriam, "and to ask advice of the doctor—not professional; but it's partly a business matter, and I can't bear to speak of it to Ronald or Sandy; though, indeed, I cannot—oh, it would be impossible!—I never, never could; there is, after all, but one course open to me; and yet—and yet—"

"What is it, dear?" asked Serena, as Miriam

broke off abruptly, hiding her face in her hands, while the hot blood mounted to her very hair. "If it's anything Alonzo can help you in, he will do it most gladly, I am sure. He's away for to-day at Fairfield, or near there; I expected him home this morning, but had a telegram awhile ago saying he couldn't leave a very sick patient till to-morrow. Oh," arriving at an inkling of the truth by a sudden intuition, "it's that horrid Bangs! I know it is! Have him? No, of course you couldn't! 'twould be worse than death by far!"

"Yes, Serena; oh, a thousand times worse!" Miriam exclaimed, dropping her hands and fixing anguished eyes on her friend's face. "But oh, you don't know what mischief—not to me only, but to those dearer than myself—he now has it in his power to do!"

"What, Mirry? what can he have it in his power to do to you in this free country?" queried Serena, both look and tone expressing surprise and dismay, along with some slight incredulity.

"He holds a mortgage on Lakeside; and as I am not able to meet even the full interest at present, he can foreclose and rob us of the home our father made for us—the dear home where we were all born, and where father and mother died. Is not that a hard alternative?" Miriam asked, hot tears streaming from her eyes.

"Dreadful! dreadful! But has he actually

threatened it? has he presumed to offer himself to you? He who isn't fit to wipe the dust from your shoes!" she added, in wrathful accents.

"Yes; he has done both," sighed Miriam; then went on to tell of an interview held with Bangs on the previous afternoon in the grove adjacent to the house at Lakeside.

Feeling entitled to an hour of recreation, after many spent in overseeing the men in the field, and attending to domestic duties about the house, she had gone to the grove with a book, and while pleasingly absorbed in its contents had been surprised by a visit from Bangs, who, in spite of a reception of studied coldness, had forced his society upon her and made her an offer of his hand, professing to have already bestowed his heart upon her.

"Heart, indeed!" exclaimed Serena, in hot indignation; "he doesn't own anything worthy of the name. I hope you told him so."

"Not exactly that," Miriam said, with the ghost of a smile; "but my reply was as unequivocal and decided a rejection of his suit as I knew how to make it. Then he grew furious, and haughtily informed me that he would find means to compel me to accept him or he would ruin the whole family, as he had bought the mortgage from Mr. Himes, and could foreclose when he pleased."

"Himes!" exclaimed Serena. "Oh, did you

hear the news that was telegraphed from Fairfield this morning?"

"No; what was it?"

"That Mr. Himes was attacked on his raft shortly before daylight, robbed, and nearly murdered."

"Oh, how dreadful! But he was not quite killed?"

"No; he was insensible when found; but they succeeded in restoring him to consciousness, so that he was able to tell that his robber and intended murderer was that Phelim O'Rourke who was suspected of committing the Lakeside burglary, but cleared by Bangs swearing to an *alibi*. I don't believe a word of that *alibi*, and never did; and now hope that they will get the rascal into custody and find some of your marked notes on him or in his possession somewhere."

Miriam drew a long breath. "Oh, if that should happen!" she cried, "I—I think it would help me to get out of Bangs's power."

"I do believe it would!" exclaimed Serena, her eyes sparkling at the thought. "But whether that happens or not, Alonzo is sure to find a way of escape for you. Miriam, he's the best and kindest-hearted man that ever was made. I used to think I was fond of Perry's father—Perry Golding, Sr.—but it was nothing to compare to my love for his successor."

"I am so glad," Miriam said, smiling sympa-

thetically into the speaker's eyes, "for the doctor is worthy of all the love you can give him, and it makes you both so happy. You have never told me anything about Mr. Golding. He was killed in the war—in battle—was he not?"

"No; he joined the Confederate army in spite of the strongest opposition on my part, and after a while I had word that he was sick in a hospital down in Alabama, and though I hurried there as fast as possible, he was dead before my arrival—dead and buried; they showed me his grave, and gave me his clothes, but wouldn't let me remove the body.

"I went home in deep grief, for I had been quite attached to poor Perry. But he wasn't the man Dr. Jasper is; he would get drunk occasionally, and then be cross and unreasonable; sometimes actually abusive."

She broke off with a sudden exclamation, "Oh, see what a crowd is coming down the street! I wonder what it means?"

They sprang to their feet and stood gazing intently at an approaching party of horsemen, followed by a motley crowd of men and boys on foot.

As they drew near enough for the recognition of faces, Miriam remarked, in a low tone, to her companion, "That is Mr. Duncan, the county sheriff, riding at the head; and he has a prisoner in charge. Can it be?—yes, yes, it is

Phelim O'Rourke! Oh, how thankful I am that they have caught him—the would-be murderer of that poor old man!"

"So am I; but why do they bring him here? Why not take him to Fairfield? so much nearer as it is to the place where he did the dreadful deed."

"Because this is the county town, and the jail is here. He richly deserves hanging; but capital punishment has been abolished in this State. Besides, if his victim doesn't die it wouldn't be a hanging matter in any State—ought not to be, of course."

"There'll be a trial, anyhow," remarked Serena, "and Bangs will, I presume, do his best to defend the scoundrel again; but I hope he will not be able to save him from the penitentiary."

The crowd had passed, and Miriam found it was time for her to go home. The friends parted affectionately, Serena exhorting Miriam to be brave and cheerful, for the doctor would surely find a way to help her out of her trouble.

Miriam walked briskly on, hardly looking to the right or left, for her thoughts were very busy with her personal difficulties and the startling events of the morning. So it was a surprise when she was suddenly addressed by a man's voice speaking in gentlemanly accents, "Excuse me, madam, but can you direct me to the house of Dr. Jasper?" and turning her head,

perceived a stranger standing, hat in hand, by her side.

"Yes," she said; "it is that pretty house yonder, on the other side of the street, nearly two squares below here, and with roses and honeysuckle climbing over the front porch."

"Thank you," he returned, with a low bow, and hurried away in the direction indicated.

"I wonder who he is?" thought Miriam, sending a backward glance after the retreating figure. "Somebody wanting the doctor, I suppose. Dear me! why didn't I think to tell him that he is out of town and will not return till to-morrow?"

It was too late for that now, so she dismissed the stranger from her thoughts and hastened on her way, feeling that she had already lingered too long.

Perry had gone back to his play, and Serena was still seated in the porch, with a bit of sewing in her hand, stitching industriously and softly humming a snatch of song in the fulness of her content and joy in the thought of her loved husband and two darling children, when the gate opened, and lifting her head at the sound, she saw a tall man of military bearing stride in, snatch up Perry, and give him a vigorous hug and kiss.

"Don't, man! oo dus et me be!" cried the little fellow, struggling to release himself.

Setting him on his feet again, the stranger

passed quickly up the porch steps and stood before Serena. She glanced up into his bearded face in surprised inquiry, sprang to her feet, and stepped back a pace or two, her heart beating wildly, the color suffusing her face, then suddenly retreating, and leaving it of a death-like pallor.

"Don't you know me?" he asked, with a slightly scornful curl of the lip.

"Yes," she answered, slowly, her voice trembling with agitation; "it's—George Golding, the brother of my former husband, Perry's father."

"No; it's not George, but Perry himself. I'm your husband, Serena, and you're my wife. My claim is stronger than Jasper's, and he'll have to give you up to me."

A look of anguish swept over her wan face, and she clutched at a chair-back for support.

"It isn't true," she said, hoarsely; "it can't be true, for Perry Golding died three years ago. I went to the hospital to nurse him, but he was dead before I got there; they told me so, and they showed me his grave and gave me his clothes."

"'Twas all a lie, then," he asserted, "for here I am, alive and well, and I've come for my wife, and intend to have her, too—her and my son."

"I'll not go with you!" she cried, the color returning to her cheek and her eyes flashing

with anger. "I tell you my former husband is dead, and you—you are an impostor!"

"Am I?" he said, coolly, helping himself to a chair. "Sit down and listen to what I have to say in proof of my identity."

She dropped into her seat again, and he went on to speak of some things known only to him and herself. He succeeded in convincing her; she knew and acknowledged that he was the husband she had so long believed to be in his grave, so long ceased to mourn, but it was with bitter sobs and tears that she did so; she drew herself away when he would have embraced her, and bade him leave her—at least for the present.

Perry had joined them, and stood by his mother's side, glancing wonderingly from one to the other. Presently he doubled up his fist and shook it in his father's face. "Go 'way, bad man!" he said, fiercely; "oo make my mamma cry. Go 'way! I'll tell my papa on oo, and he'll whip oo!"

"He'll have a big job on his hands if he attempts that," Golding said, regarding the little fellow with an amused smile. "But I'm your papa, my man."

"No, oo ain't!" cried the child, backing away as he would have taken him by the hand.

Just then an infant's cry came from within the house

"There! oo've waked the baby—my 'ittle

sister—oo bad ole man! Go 'way dis minute!" cried Perry, with a stamp of his baby foot, while Serena rose hurriedly, ran into the sitting-room, snatched her babe from its crib, and, straining it to her breast, turned and faced Golding, who had followed her in.

"Yours?" he queried, with an angry flush on his cheek.

"Yes, mine," she said, firmly, soothing it with tenderest caresses; "my own precious darling."

"Jasper's brat, eh? She'll have to be left behind when you go with me."

"Then I'll never go with you! Leave my baby, indeed! never, never while I draw the breath of life!"

"Now, see here, Serena," he said, in a tone of expostulation, "you know you're not Jasper's wife, and can't be while I live."

She turned on him fiercely. "What right had you to go away and leave me for three years to believe you dead and buried? If you had ever written me a line or sent a message even by some one else, this would never have happened. You are responsible for it all, and you have no right to claim me now. Where have you been all these years?"

"In Mexico. I've made money enough to enable us to live in comfort and even luxury, and I thought to share it with you and our boy."

"Money!" she cried, with ineffable scorn; "you would bribe me with money to leave this darling," gazing down at her babe with tear-dimmed eyes, an expression of unspeakable love and tenderness stealing over her features, "and —and the husband who has been far, far more tender and true than ever you were, Perry Golding."

"Not your husband, madam; he can't be that while I live; and now that you know that I am living, you will leave him at once if you are a—the virtuous woman I always took you to be."

"Go! leave me this moment!" she cried, imperiously. "You, and you alone, are to blame for this dreadful state of things!"

"I go," he said, bowing himself out; "but you and Jasper will hear from me again."

"Oh, how cruel, how cruel he is!" she sobbed, sinking into a low rocker. "He knew I was married again; he had heard it; and why couldn't he stay away and leave me in peace? Oh, it would break my heart to leave Alonzo, and you, my precious, precious baby!" clasping it close, and covering its face with kisses and tears.

"Don't cry, mamma; the naughty man's gone," said Perry, creeping to her side and putting an arm around her neck; "don't cry; he sha'n't come back any more; I'll watch the gate, and if I see him coming, I'll run and lock the door."

"Oh, Perry, we can't keep him out!" she sighed, hugging and kissing the little prattler, while the big tears rolled down her cheeks. "What shall I do?"

"Send for papa to come right away."

"So I will," she said, laying her babe in the crib again, and going to her writing-desk. "Run to the kitchen, Perry, dear, and tell Annie I want her."

Taking a slip of paper from the desk, she wrote a message:

"Come home; I have urgent need of you."

Annie was at her side before the last word was penned. The girl had overheard a part of the interview between her mistress and the stranger, and was full of excitement and curiosity.

"Oh, Mrs. Jasper, what's wrong?" she exclaimed. "Was that one o' them burglars threatenin' you? They're gettin' so bold, nobody knows what they won't do next."

"No; he was not a burglar," Serena answered, speaking with as entire composure as she could command. "I want you to take this slip of paper to the telegraph office and ask them to send the message I have written on it to Dr. Jasper, at Fairfield, as promptly as possible. Here is the money to pay for it."

Mr. Himes had recovered sufficiently to be told of the arrest of O'Rourke, with all the fruits of the robbery of the raft in his possession; for

so hot had been the pursuit that the villains had found no opportunity for a division of the spoils.

The old man received the news with exultation, declaring his intention to prosecute to the utmost extent of the law, and at once engaged Captain Charlton as his attorney.

The latter was preparing to leave for Prairieville, Dr. Jasper intending to remain behind till the next day, when Serena's telegram was handed him. He could not imagine what was amiss at home ; but her assertion that she had urgent need of him was sufficient to work an immediate change in his plans. Consigning his Fairfield patients to the care of another physician, he drove back to Prairieville with Charlton, and about the middle of the afternoon alighted at his own door.

Little Perry greeted him with a welcoming shout. " Oh, papa, I'm so glad you've comed ! A naughty man comed here and made mamma cry, and she doesn't stop. But oo won't let him come any more ; will oo, papa ?"

" I shall certainly not allow anybody to trouble mamma if I can help it, my boy," returned the doctor, hurrying into the house.

Serena met him, all bathed in tears, and threw herself sobbing into his arms.

" My darling !" he exclaimed, in surprise and concern, " what is wrong ? what can have happened to distress you so ?"

"Oh, Alonzo, the worst, the very worst thing you can imagine! Perry Golding is not dead—there was some strange mistake; he is here; in town; and—and he claims me as more his than yours. But oh, I love you—only you; and it will kill me if I have to go back to him!"

"It is beyond belief!" he cried, aghast. "Surely the fellow is an impostor!"

"No; I thought so at first; but he proved his identity to me beyond a doubt. Oh, tell me, have I not a right to choose between you and cling to the one I love best—the one who will let me have both my children?—for he would force me to leave my baby behind."

"Then he is utterly unworthy of you!" exclaimed the doctor, in hot indignation.

"Then you will not let him tear me away from you?" she sobbed, clinging closer to him.

"It would be like submitting to having my heart torn out," he groaned; "but oh, my dear, I cannot yet see what can be done—how I can rightfully ignore his claim to you, my heart's idol! Let me think," he added, releasing her from his embrace and beginning to pace the floor.

"He deserted me and left me for three years to believe him dead and buried," she said. "I think I've heard that was considered sufficient ground for divorce."

"According to man's enactments, yes; but,

dearest," gazing on her with a look of yearning tenderness, "we who profess to be God's followers and children must abide by the law of God, who permits divorce for but one cause. Ah," with a brightening countenance as a sudden recollection came to him, " I do remember now to have heard, before we left your old home, that Perry Golding had given you that one cause !"

" Is it so ?" she cried, half breathlessly. " I had not known it, though I can well believe it may have been true. Tell me about it, please."

He did so.

" And you will tell him ?" she said, when he had finished his story ; " and surely he must see at once that he has no longer any rightful claim to me, and will go away and leave us in peace."

" There will have to be a divorce," replied the doctor. " I hope he may be induced to join in asking for it, in which case, if I am not very much mistaken, the judge can grant it without bringing the affair into court."

" And if he won't join in the request ?" she asked, almost holding her breath to listen for his reply.

" You may have to sue for divorce, bringing your proof of marital infidelity and desertion."

" Oh, horrible !" she cried, shuddering, and

hiding her face ; " to have all that dragged before the public !"

" Dearest, do not distress yourself," he said, tenderly, and with emotion ; " we will hope that alternative may not be forced upon you."

CHAPTER XIV.

IT was past noon when Belinda left the raft, carrying a large basket containing her husband's clothes and such other articles as there might be pressing need of for him or herself. She hoped to make arrangements for storing their goods in some safe place, and to return in the course of the afternoon with a conveyance for them, and some one to assist in their removal.

She had not gone far when she met a farmer driving leisurely along the road.

"Good-day," he called to her. "If I was goin' your way I'd give ye a lift; that basket looks heavy; but I'm comin' from the town and you a goin' toward it. Good deal of excitement there to-day. Did ye hear the news?"

"What news?" she asked, her heart leaping into her mouth.

"Why, that they've nabbed the murderer; leastways, the scoundrel that attackted that old man on the raft and left him fer dead. They've took him to Prairieville to the jail. He'd ought to be strung right up, I say; fer I've not the least doubt that he's at the head o' the gang o' burglars that's been robbin' here and there till

nobody in this whole region of country knows when he and his family and goods is safe."

He had reined in his horses, and she had set down her basket for a moment's rest while listening to what he had to say.

"But don't you think everybody'd ought to have a fair trial?" she asked, with some hesitation.

"That's so, when there's any doubt o' their guilt and any chance o' their gettin' their deserts; which, howsomever, there ain't in this instance, seein' that the law's so that they can't nohow mete out to the murderers the measure they've meted to their victims; and that ain't accordin' to Scriptur', nohow you kin fix it," he said, flecking a fly off his horse's back with the lash of his whip. "There's some folks that talk as if 'twas worse than hangin' to be shut up in State's prison fer life," he went on, "but I always notice that them that's in favor of the criminal is pretty generally o' the opinion that they've gained a good deal fer him when they get a death sentence commuted to that; because, you see, there's always a chance o' some governor that wants to secure the votes o' that class pard'nin' him out."

"Yes; but it's an awful thing to put a man to death, because if you find out afterward that he was innocent, you can't make it up to him nohow at all," she said, taking up her basket; and with a parting nod she went on her way.

On entering the town, she at once perceived evidences of unusual excitement among the inhabitants: men were grouped together on the sidewalks and about the store doors, neighbor-women talking across fences or leaning out of windows, discussing the all-absorbing topic of the robbery and attempted murder of old Farmer Himes, and the arrest of the supposed leader of the gang of burglars who had been for months past the terror of Wild River Valley.

Occasionally Belinda heard her own name coupled with the remark that the old man believed her to be in league with his would-be assassins, the speaker or the one addressed sometimes adding that she, too, ought to be arrested and put in prison for trial.

She hurried on her way, growing more and more frightened at every step, till by the time she had gained the door of the tavern whither her husband had been conveyed she was ready to drop with fatigue and alarm.

And the reception she met with there was not calculated to reassure her; evidently every one regarded her with suspicion; and the landlord, on learning who she was, coldly informed her that he had no room for her; she would have to find accommodation elsewhere.

"Didn't they bring my husband here? and isn't he a lyin' now in one o' them bedrooms o' yours?" she asked, trying to put on a bold, defiant air.

"Yes; but what of that?"

"Why, I've come to nurse him; and of course I'll share his room; so you needn't tell me you haven't got one for me."

"Not so fast, woman," returned Mr. Strong. "The old man says you have more love for O'Rourke than for him—in fact, he accuses you of betraying him into the hands of his would-be assassins, and swears that he will henceforward have nothing whatever to do with you—neither let you nurse him nor pay any bills of your contracting. So, as I don't board folks for nothing, there's no place for you here."

She was opening her lips to offer her services as cook or chambermaid, when a thought of the danger of arrest on suspicion of having been accessory to the attempt on her husband's life caused a sudden abandonment of that idea.

"It's a lie!" she cried, with a show of great indignation, "a wicked lie that I had anything to do with them robbers tryin' to git a holt o' his money and kill him. If it hadn't been fer me a runnin' with all my might fer help, he'd been a dead man hours ago, a bleedin' there on the raft, without a soul to do nothin' fer him. But I'll go and leave the ongrateful old idyot to git along the best he kin without me."

She stooped, and taking a small parcel from the basket which she had set down on the floor beside her, "These is my clo'es; t'others is hisn," she said, and without so much as a part-

ing salutation stalked into the street and away faster than she had come, anger and the fear of pursuit lending her strength.

She returned to the raft, but by a roundabout way, with the design of throwing any possible pursuer off the scent. She reached it well-nigh spent with exertion and the agitation of mind she had undergone for so many hours ; indeed, for many days and weeks she had been ill at ease, torn by conflicting emotions—hatred of the man who tyrannized over her, reproached by conscience for that and the guilty love indulged for O'Rourke, tempted to abet him in his intended crime, yet at times filled with horror at thought of the awful deed, and terror of the more than possible consequences to him and herself.

Standing on the grassy bank below which the raft was moored, she sent a hasty, searching glance around. There was neither sight nor sound of pursuit, and leaping on board, she threw herself down on its floor and lay there for some minutes, panting and trembling.

What should she do ? where fly for refuge ? there was no safety here ; people would presently be flocking to look upon the scene of the attempted murder ; she thought, as she lifted her head and glanced about, that she perceived evidences that some had already been there ; doubtless news of Phelim's arrest had called them in another direction, but surely they would soon return, bringing others with them.

Some, if not all, believing the old man's story, would hoot and jeer at her, perhaps offer her personal violence—throw her into the river, drag her ashore, and, maybe, hang her to the nearest tree; she had heard of such things, had read in the newspapers of suspected criminals being lynched by furious mobs, who utterly refused to listen to their protestations of innocence.

It behooved her to fly instantly; but, ah! whither could she go? She had neither relative nor friend. Phelim's parents detested her on account of her marriage to Himes; his associates would be very likely to make away with her, should the chance offer, lest she should become a witness against them. She had not been long in the neigborhood when hired by Himes, and had always lived a lonely life on the farm.

Despair was taking possession of her when there came to her recollection the fact that Phelim had told her of a little cave in the rocky bank of the river only a short distance higher up the stream than she now was.

He believed its existence to be known only to himself, and had given her a very particular description of its location, remarking that she might have occasion to conceal herself there in case suspicion should arise of her complicity in his crime, or her presence be required as a witness against him in court, should he be caught and brought to trial.

She had a horror of caves—their dampness and darkness, and the possibility of reptiles and wild beasts harboring there—but such a hiding-place seemed her last hope in this hour of fear and peril. She remembered its existence with a thrill of something akin to joy, and wondering that she could have forgotten it for even a moment, rose, gathered together a few necessaries —some food, candles, a box of matches, a few articles of clothing, and a blanket to lie upon—and set out at once in search of the spot.

So well had Phelim described it that she found it with but little difficulty, though the entrance was concealed from view by a thick growth of bushes and creeping vines. It could be reached only by a very steep climb up the almost perpendicular face of the high, rocky bank.

Her first ascent was made slowly and with much toil and fear of falling, and when at last she had gained the rocky ledge in front of the opening, pushed aside the overhanging vines, and looked within, nothing but the blackness of darkness met her gaze, and she shrank back with a shudder, in terror of all kinds of venomous and savage creatures.

But quickly she nerved herself to enter, struck a match, lighted a candle, and sent a searching glance around from side to side and up overhead. It was a small, irregularly shaped room, the ceiling barely high enough to enable her to

stand upright in it, the walls of solid rock showing no crevice wherein beast or even snake could hide.

She drew a long breath of relief, stuck her candle in a little niche in the wall, climbed down again to the base of the cliff, and gathering up the articles she had brought, made the ascent a second time, and deposited them in the cave.

She was compelled to refresh herself with rest and food before she could attempt any further exertion ; it was near sundown when she again ventured to the vicinity of the raft, approaching with great caution till, from the shelter of a clump of bushes, she could obtain a view of it.

She had already heard the sound of human voices coming from that direction, so was not surprised, though very much disturbed, at sight of a crowd of men and boys, with here and there a woman or girl, upon it and the adjacent bank.

They seemed to be making free with whatever was to be found on board, and with a sigh and a muttered, " There won't be nothin' left o' our goods and things ; they'll carry 'em all off or break 'em up ; and oh, my, but won't Himes be mad !" She dropped down upon the grass behind the bushes, and there waited and watched for their departure.

But the last did not leave till the glow of the sunset had quite faded from the sky, and night's sable pall was slowly settling down over the

earth. It was already too dark to board the raft with safety ; almost too dark to make her way back to the cavern ; but moving slowly and with extreme caution she accomplished the task.

She passed a most uncomfortable night ; the blanket spread upon the rock made but a hard bed ; the air of the cave was damp, close, and stifling ; a guilty conscience, remorse, and terror were but poor bedfellows.

The hours dragged wearily along, seeming as if they would never end ; again and again she pushed aside the overhanging vines and peered out to see if the dawn had not come ; and with the first streak of light in the east she crept from her hiding-place and back to the raft.

She found it stripped of everything valuable. In fact, a part of the crowd she had seen there the previous afternoon were men sent by Mr. Himes to remove his goods and chattels to a place of safety.

Thus she was cut off from the supplies she had hoped to secure, and starvation would soon be staring her in the face if she remained in hiding, while to leave her retreat seemed too perilous a move to be contemplated for a moment. Yet loathing and dreading its darkness and closeness, she lingered where she was till the sun grew hot and she thought she descried in the distance a man approaching from the direction of the town. That sight sent her hurrying back to her poor refuge in a panic of fear.

CHAPTER XV.

THE news of the arrest of O'Rourke, following upon his robbery of Himes, more especially because one of the notes stolen from Lakeside was found upon his person, was highly exasperating to Colonel Bangs. He visited the jail that same evening, and held a rather stormy interview with the prisoner, reminding him of his warning that it was a dangerous thing to carry that note about with him, and telling him passionately that he should have kept it carefully hidden in some safe place.

"You've been a precious fool!" he concluded, "for who now will put any faith in the *alibi* I swore to in your favor?"

"If ye're the smart lawyer I take ye fer, ye kin git me out o' this throuble in spite o' that," returned Phelim, coolly; "an' ye'd betther be afther thryin' yer purtiest, or mabbe I moight be indooced to turn State's ividence agin ye in that matther o' the Lakeside burglary, to say nothin' o' wan or two ither jobs o' the same sort."

Bangs's face flushed hotly; he was furious at the implied threat, but felt it his wisest course

to conceal his anger and adopt a milder and more conciliatory tone.

"That would be very foolish, Phelim," he said, with a forced laugh; "for if you got me sent to prison, who would defend you in future scrapes? I'll undertake your defence this time, as a matter of course, and never fear that I'll fail to clear you. I'd be willing to wager my head that we'll come off with flying colors."

"But I'll have to clear out o' this part o' the counthry; 'twouldn't niver do to attimpt to ply me thrade round here no more."

"It would be a great risk, certainly," returned Bangs. "But tell me, is there any truth in Himes's story that his wife aided and abetted you?"

"Av coorse not!" asserted Phelim; "what fer wad she be afther poverizin' hersilf? If the ould man's money was all gone, sure he'd have none to use in buyin' victuals an' clo'es fer hissilf, let alone her."

"And you weren't intending to rob him of her as well as the money, eh?" queried Bangs, with a covert sneer.

Phelim's only answer was a harsh laugh.

Bangs did not press the question. "I must go now," he said, rising and drawing out his watch. "Good-night; I'll be in again before long."

The next morning, while Belinda sat in despairing wretchedness upon the raft, and Phelim,

the hardened criminal, slept unconcernedly in his prison cell, Bangs wended his way to the butcher's shop to secure for his dinner the cut of beef most to his liking. He was early, but found several customers there before him, among them Barney Nolan.

"Out of my way, fellow!" growled Bangs, pushing rudely past Barney. "There, Hicks," to the butcher, who was busily at work, saw in hand, over the dead animal, "that's the very cut I'm after."

"Now, that's rather a pity, isn't it, colonel, seein' it's sold already?" returned Hicks, in a slightly sarcastic tone, taking it up with despatch, throwing it into the scales, then wrapping a piece of brown paper about it and bestowing it in Barney's basket.

"Sir, I am not accustomed to such treatment!" cried Bangs, wrathfully. "I spoke for that particular cut before you had it sawed off."

"Just so," returned Hicks, with nonchalance; "but Nolan spoke for it full five minutes sooner; and it's first come first served in this shop."

"An Irish laborer, with a family to support, has no business to be buying the most expensive piece of beef in the market, when there's plenty of cheaper to be had," said Bangs, eyeing Barney with anger and disdain.

"Faix, sor, an' isn't it jist yersilf that wad betther be afther moindin' yer own business,

an' lavin' an honest man, that pays as good money an' honest fer his mate as anny in yer purse, to moind hisn?" queried Barney, with air and tone of sturdy independence. "An' I'm not a sodger no longer, sor; nor is yersilf the colonel o' me rigiment, to have it in yer power to thrate me loike a brute baste intirely, as yez did in the war that's over an' done wid, thank the blissid Vargin an' all the howly saints."

Bangs replied with a volley of oaths and curses, while Barney stepped leisurely past him to the outer door and into the street, as if he heeded them no more than the idle whistling of the wind.

Bangs shook his fist after the retreating form, then turned and poured out the vials of his wrath upon Hicks. He had never in all his life been so shamefully treated! The idea of a man of his circumstances and standing in society having his wishes set aside for the gratification of those of a low-born foreigner; a fellow without means or brains!

"I'll not stand it, sir," he concluded. "I'll take my custom elsewhere."

"All right, Mr. Bangs; I'm able to do without it," returned Hicks, with cheerful indifference; "there's always a plenty of folks wantin' meat for themselves and their families."

"Of course, people must eat to live," remarked a bystander. "And hard words are

not the sort to win favors with," he added, with a meaning glance at Bangs—a glance that spoke ill-concealed contempt and aversion ; for the latter—never a favorite with his neighbors and townsmen—was growing more and more unpopular day by day ; at least, with the better class.

" I ask no favors from any man, but neither will I submit to injustice," he retorted, stalking haughtily into the street and away.

Meanwhile, Barney was hastening homeward, chuckling over Bangs's discomfiture, which on his arrival he described with great glee to Nora and the children.

Nora had cleaning to do at Lakeside that day, and an hour or two later rehearsed the story in the ears of Mrs. Heath and Miriam.

" Mr. Hicks was quite right," was the old lady's comment, and Miriam echoed it in her heart, though she said nothing.

" And did yees know, Miss Miriam, that Phalim O'Rourke was the scoundrel that robbed yees, afther all, jist as Barney said ? wan o' thim notes bein' found on his person when they catched him."

" Yes, I heard it ; and the note was brought to me last night."

" Indade, miss ! an' sure I'm glad fer yees that ye've got it back ; an' it's mesilf as hopes they'll all come back till ye—ivery wan o' thim ; an' it's me that's glad intirely they've got that

thafe of a villain an' murderer safe in jail. It's no thanks to him, the scoundrel, that the ould man—Farmer Himes—wasn't kilt intirely ; an' for why shouldn't he swing for the wicked deed ?"

" The law doesn't hang men in this State," said Miriam ; " besides, fortunately, Mr. Himes isn't dead, and the doctors, I believe, consider him likely to recover."

" An' sure, miss, wad the loike o' that be afther makin' anny difference to the dirty rascal, Phalim O'Rourke ?" asked Nora ; " wad they be afther lettin' him go ?"

" He'll be tried for his crime, and if found guilty will be sent to the penitentiary for a term of years," answered Miriam.

" An' Misther Bangs wull be afther clearin' av him, av coorse," remarked Nora, in extreme disgust.

" I think it altogether likely he will try to do so," Miriam said.

Before the day was over she had learned that her surmise was correct, and the tidings increased her already intense detestation of Bangs. She could see no redeeming trait in his character, and strongly suspected him of being in league with the band of burglars who had committed so many depredations in the valley for months past. Surely that *alibi* he had sworn to on Phelim's trial for the Lakeside burglary was a lie, and what motive could he

have had for thus perjuring himself unless he were a party to the theft and a sharer in the spoils?

She put that query to Ronald while having a little private chat with him before they separated for the night.

"It certainly looks very suspicious," he said in reply; "still it is possible that some one else may have committed the robbery here—another one of the gang, for instance—and passed off the note upon O'Rourke afterward, and that Bangs had had no connection with the deed or knowledge of it afterward."

"Yes," returned Miriam, slowly and thoughtfully, "I suppose it is possible, yet I cannot help feeling that my suspicion is just; I am morally certain of it; and I shall find it difficult to treat Bangs with the barest civility should he ever call here again."

"He will be here again; I haven't a doubt of it," Ronald said, laughingly. "It's plain that he comes a wooing, Mirry; but I warn you that I shall never give my consent to the match."

"It will never be asked by me," she said, her eyes flashing and the hot blood surging over face and neck at the thought of the baseness of the man and the audacity of his pursuit of her. "Oh, Ronald, I would die a thousand deaths rather than link my life with that of so sordid, cruel, haughty, and unprincipled a wretch!"

"And I," said Ronald, dropping his bantering tone and speaking with emotion, "should even prefer to see my darling Sister Miriam sleeping peacefully in her coffin; though what we should ever do without her I cannot tell."

"I think you are not likely to find out very soon, Ron dear," she said, forcing a smile, for her heart was very heavy; "I'm strong and healthy, and hope to live till you are all ready to do without me."

"In that case you certainly will not die young, sister mine," he responded, with a look of strong, brotherly affection. "But you are worn out with the cares and labors of the day; so we'll say good-night; and don't, I beg of you, sit up to sew, or lie awake brooding over losses and the perplexing problem how we are to pay off that troublesome mortgage. It's a good omen that a part of the stolen money has been recovered, and I do believe we'll be helped through the whole difficulty. Just think what good Christians our father and mother were, and how many prayers they sent up for us, their loved children."

"Yes; it is often the greatest comfort to me to think of that, and of what the Bible says about a good man leaving an inheritance to his children's children," she said, smiling through tears.

The next few weeks were a time of heavy trial to Miriam. Bangs beset her at every turn,

meeting her in her walks and rides, coming on her when she was in the field, and could not escape from him, and urging his suit with persuasions, promises, and threats, determined to win her, in spite of the most firm and decided rejection repeated again and again.

And Warren Charlton, whose visits were always so welcome, stayed away. She would hardly own it to herself, but that was an added drop in her cup of bitterness, as she wondered vaguely what she could have said or done to offend him.

She did her best to hide her troubles from her grandmother and Ronald, assuming in their presence a cheerfulness and even gayety which she was far from feeling. The only friends in whom she felt ready to confide, and whose sympathy and advice would have been a help to her, were Dr. and Mrs. Jasper ; but she had not the heart to ask it of them, a pathetic note from Serena having acquainted her with the trial they were passing through.

Earthly helpers failed her ; she seemed left to breast the storm alone, while the clouds grew darker day by day, as Bangs waxed more and more wroth at her steadfast refusal to bend to his will.

Then she turned for help to the God of her fathers, crying to Him : " ' Deliver me, oh, my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.' "

Meanwhile, Mr. Himes was recovering from his wounds much more rapidly than had been supposed possible, and was gloating over the prospect of bringing his intended murderer to trial. He held frequent interviews with Charlton, and the latter was kept very busy in hunting up evidence in that and several important cases likely to be called up at the next term of court.

It was this unusual pressure of important business which kept him away from Lakeside, in spite of a strong desire to see his friends there —Miriam not less than other members of the family.

Mr. Himes's condition had so greatly improved that he was no longer confined to his room, but usually spent the greater part of the day among the loungers on the porch before the barroom door, and occasionally walked a short distance up or down the street. He was an early riser, and often came down-stairs long before the call to breakfast, eager to exchange the closeness and heat of his circumscribed bedroom for the fresh outside air of street or porch.

"Strong," he asked, one evening as they sat smoking there together, "what's become o' that raft o' mine? d'ye know?"

"I b'lieve it's lyin' moored just where ye left it," was the reply; "I heard somebody say so a day or two since."

" Well, I'm goin' to walk out there and see for myself."

" I wouldn't try a walk o' that length yet awhile, if I was you, Himes," returned Strong, with a look of surprise ; " ye're weak yet and the weather's hot ; the sun was scorching hot to-day."

" Then I'll be up and off before sunrise ; back again before your breakfast-bell rings. I'll try it to-morrow mornin'."

" I wouldn't if I was you," repeated Strong ; " you haven't got the strength for it ; besides," drawing closer to the old man and speaking in an undertone, " there's been two suspicious-looking fellows hanging round the town for the last day or two, and who knows but they may belong to the gang that robbed and tried to murder you? They may be watching an opportunity to finish up the job."

" Nonsense ! I won't have a cent about me, and, of course, it was the money they was after then. Besides, the rascal that did the job is fast locked up in jail now."

" Yes ; but they may be wantin' to put you out o' the way, so's you can't give evidence against him on the trial. I wouldn't trust 'em."

" I'm not afeard," sneered the old man ; " I never gave nobody no reason to call me a coward, and I don't mean to, neither."

" Common-sense prudence is not cowardice," returned the landlord ; " in your weak state

you'd stand no chance against one strong man, let alone two."

"It's all guesswork that those fellers belong to the gang and are after me, and I don't believe a word of it," said Himes, testily.

Strong was beginning a fresh expostulation when his wife interposed, "Oh, let him alone, John, do! If he's a mind to throw away his life, why need you worry yourself to prevent him?"

"Well, now, that's not it," said Himes; "I've no mind to throw away my life; not till I've seen Phelim O'Rourke brought to justice, anyhow; so I'll maybe put off goin' out o' town for a while; I'm gittin' stronger every day." With that he knocked the ashes from his pipe, put it in his pocket, and with a gruff, "Goodnight to ye, folks," started off for his bedroom.

The old man had a good deal of obstinacy and tenacity of purpose in his composition, and waking early the next morning, he resolved to carry out his plan at once; for why should he care what Strong and his wife thought about it? he had as much sense as either of them, or both together, for that matter.

He hurried on his clothes and stole quietly from the house, for it was hardly broad daylight, and no one, not even a servant, yet astir.

An hour later a farmer driving into the town with a load of produce for the market found him lying dead by the roadside, foully murdered; the assassins had done their work

thoroughly this time, and life was utterly extinct.

The news flew like lightning, not through Fairfield only, but to the neighboring towns and all up and down the valley, being telegraphed from point to point.

It caused great excitement, and increased the feeling of hot indignation against the leader of the gang, by whose orders, as almost every one believed, this second and successful attempt had been made upon the old man's life ; and also the unpopularity of Bangs, who was to defend him on the approaching trial.

Besides that, it set men to discussing the justice and righteousness of the law of the State, which ran counter to that law of God, " Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

The large majority felt and said that the death penalty was the only adequate punishment that could be inflicted upon O'Rourke and his confederates, who had finally accomplished the deed of blood attempted by him, and them under his leadership.

Miriam heard the news with a thrill of horror. " Had Bangs had anything to do with the instigation of the atrocious crime?" she asked herself ; " might he not be wicked enough to connive at such a deed, that thus the principal witness against his client should be prevented from testifying at the trial?"

She shuddered at the thought, but could not banish it, and when, a few days later, he called to once more press his suit, she shrank from him in undisguised aversion.

It roused him to fury, which he vainly endeavored to hide under an appearance of lover-like devotion. He had come to her in no amiable mood, for ever since the news of Himes's death had reached Prairieville his fellow-townsmen had treated him to nothing but looks of coldness, scorn, and contempt. No one meeting him on the street or in the haunts of business had a word of cordial greeting for him; each passed him by with scarcely a nod of recognition, and their glances spoke only disapproval and suspicion. It maddened him; all the more because his conscience was not clear; and he had been on the verge of a violent quarrel several times during the day.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when he reached Lakeside, and found Miriam alone in the shaded porch, resting and reading after many hours of close attention to affairs indoors and out.

Ignoring the coldness of her greeting, he took a seat close at her side, and pouring out a perfect torrent of protestations of admiration and love, repeated the offer of his hand and heart.

Lifting her head proudly, and looking him full in the eye, "Colonel Bangs," she said, "how

often must I repeat my refusal before you will receive it as final?"

"Forever!" he cried, his eyes flashing with anger. "I tell you, girl, I will never give you up; marry me you shall! I have you in my power, and you cannot escape me. I should much prefer to have you a willing bride, but —I'll even take you against your will rather than not have you at all."

Miriam rose from her chair and stepped back a pace or two; then confronting him with pale but dauntless face, "What right have you to address such language to me, sir?" she asked, in freezing, haughty tones, holding her head proudly erect and gazing unflinchingly into his eyes. "I am a free woman, living in a free land, and no one can compel me to marry against my inclination."

"Even a free woman may find the compelling force of circumstances too strong for her," he retorted; "and I think it will be so in your case, for only by consenting to become my wife can you save yourself and those nearest and dearest to you from being turned out homeless into the world."

She had grown very pale while he spoke, but she answered in firm, though gentle tones, and with the same dauntless air with which she had replied to him at first, "To do as you wish would be a sin, because to love, honor, or respect you would be impossible to me. I utterly

refuse compliance, and putting my trust in God, my father's God, I defy you to do your worst !"

" And I'll do it. I'll take steps for the foreclosing of that mortgage before I'm a day older," he said, in low tones of concentrated fury, as he rose and bowed himself out.

Turning on the threshold, " How happy you will feel when you have to leave this beautiful place, the comfortable home and the farm that has been your means of support ! How you will enjoy the distress of your aged grandmother and the little orphan brother and sister, knowing you could have spared them all their pain and suffering !"

An expression of anguish swept over her features, but was gone in a moment, while in a firm voice she answered, " I trust in Him of whom the Bible tells me, ' He shall judge the poor of the people, He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. . . . He shall deliver the needy when he crieth ; the poor, also, and him that hath no helper.' "

He had heard enough, and hurried away with the words ringing in his ears, while Miriam sought the privacy of her own room, to pour out her distresses and her cry for deliverance from the unrighteous and cruel man to Him who had declared Himself the " Father of the fatherless and a judge of the widows" and " the hearer and answerer of prayer."

Bangs had walked out from the town, and was now hurrying back to it, almost beside himself with rage, mortification, and disappointment. He had made sure that Miriam would yield to his demand rather than face the alternative he set before her ; and the estimate of his character which she had given him was far from flattering to his self-love and conceit.

There had been nothing of unselfish love in his passion for her, and now it was turned to bitterest hate, so that he could have found a fiendish delight in dealing her a death-blow ; in fact, he was so full of rage and hatred toward the whole human race, that he would have felt an inclination to attack almost any one who should cross his path.

He met no one, however, till he had reached the principal business street of the town ; then, as he hurried along, catching the sound of footsteps in his rear, he turned about to find Barney Nolan coming toward him at a pace nearly as rapid as his own.

" What are you following me for, scoundrel ?" he demanded, accompanying the query with a volley of oaths and curses.

" It's mesilf as has as good a right to walk the strates o' the town as you, sor," retorted Barney. " Go 'long wid yees, an' niver be afther thryin' to kape Barney Nolan in order."

" None of your impudence, sirrah !" growled

Bangs, walking on, Barney still keeping in his wake.

In another minute he faced about upon the Irishman again, crying furiously, " I'll not be followed by you or anybody else, and I tell you if you don't stop it instantly it'll be the worse for you !"

" I'm not followin' ye, but jist goin' about me own business, an' that same I'll continue to do," returned Barney, coolly.

" Do it at your peril !" cried Bangs, grinding his teeth with rage.

He walked on again a few paces, but still hearing the echoing footsteps in his rear, pulled out a pistol, and turning toward Barney for the third time, fired, instantly killing the innocent object of his unreasonable anger.

Before the report had fairly died away people came rushing to the spot from all directions, so that in less than five minutes a mob of infuriated men had collected, and Bangs perceived at once that he would be lynched unless he could save himself by flight.

He darted down a side street and flew onward, the mob in hot pursuit. Panting, breathless, he gained a large distillery, and rushing in, hid behind the casks of beer.

But the mob were close at his heels ; they instantly swarmed over the whole building, hunting for him with yells and shouts of rage.

" Where is he—the bloody assassin ?" " Catch

him!" "Hang him!" "Lynch him!" "Don't wait for the law; that'll only send the wretch to State prison, though he's killed a better man than himself!"

Bangs crouched in his hiding-place, shaking with terror. Presently the barrels in front of him were violently shoved aside, a dozen hands seized him with no gentle grasp, and he was dragged out with exultant shouts of fury.

"Here he is! we've got the double-dyed villain, the bloody-handed murderer, and we'll deal out even-handed justice to him!"

"That we will!" echoed a chorus of voices.

"A rope! a rope!" was the next cry; "a rope round the murderer's neck, and off with him to the big oak-tree in front of Barton's."

Hicks, the butcher, came pushing his way through the crowd with a stout rope in his hands.

"Here, boys, how'll this answer? It's what I brought that bull into town with yesterday, and I reckon it's strong enough to hold this wild beast. Hold him, and I'll put it round his neck!"

Bangs's face was ashen, and he was trembling like an aspen leaf.

"Friends, neighbors," he began, hoarsely, "will you murder me? Will you send me into eternity without a moment's time to prepare?"

"How many minutes did you give Barney Nolan?" asked a stern voice. "'With what

measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' "

" Yes, yes ! Off with him ! Off with him ! That's right," as Hicks threw the rope over the head of the trembling culprit, and drew it close about his neck.

A shriek of mortal anguish went up from the pale lips quivering with fright: " The law ! Let the law deal with me, and don't stain your hands with my blood !"

" No, no ! the law's too easy for a wretch like you !" they yelled in his ears, as they dragged him away out of the building, over the sidewalk to the middle of the street, and on, on, his head striking against the cobble-stones at every step.

He was dead before they reached the tree where they meant to hang him, but they raised the lifeless body to one of its branches, and left it dangling there, all the same.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE pistol-shot echoed and re-echoed from the hills, the roar of the mob, the shouts and yells of rage were heard at Lakeside, creating wonder and consternation there.

Miriam had scarcely risen from her knees, and her heart was still going up in earnest pleadings for help from on high, when the report of the pistol struck her ear.

"What was that?" she asked herself. "Some one shooting at a mark, perhaps; it is not the time of year for hunting game."

She remained a few moments longer in her room, then, at the call to tea, descended the stairs to the lower hall. Just as she reached it the more startling and alarming sounds made by the mob began to be heard.

"Oh, what is it? what is happening in Prairieville?" she exclaimed, rushing into the dining-room, where the other members of the family were already gathered.

Her grandmother stood listening with pale, excited face, little Olive clinging to her skirts with affrighted looks, while Ronald and McAllister exchanged glances of surprise and inquiry, and Bertie tried to conceal his alarm by assum-

ing an air of manly unconcern, though his young heart beat fast and the color had left his cheek.

McAllister was the first to reply to Miriam's question.

"Dinna be fashed, Miss Mirry," he said; "I ken the soun' weel, for I hae heard it afore; it's the roaring and raging o' a mob o' infuriated men. Belike thae hae caught ane or more o' the burglars, and are takin' justice into their ain hands. The soun's we hear bode ill to some ane; but it canna be you or yours."

"That shot, then, you think was intended for a man?" said Ronald.

"Na doot, sir! It may be that Phelim O'Rourke has broken jail. I ken he'd be vary likely to be shot doon by some o' them he's robbed and tried to murder, sooner than he'd 'scape to do mair o' the same kin' o' mischief."

Phelim O'Rourke was at that moment in his cell, listening as intently as they to the ominous sounds—listening with paling cheek and dilated eyes, while standing at the grated window, vainly striving to get a view of what was going on far down the street.

He, too, recognized the hoarse cries of men with passions roused to a frenzy of rage and hate. Were they coming to lynch him? No; that shot fired a moment ago must have been intended for another than himself; some one of his confederates, in all probability.

But when they had finished dealing with the lesser member of the band, what more natural than that they should turn their rage upon its leader?

The thought brought out the cold beads of perspiration upon his brow, and he caught at the iron bars with a desperate effort to wrench them from their place and escape.

In vain; the task was beyond his strength; and with a groan of despair he relinquished the attempt.

"Well, it's mesilf, Phalim O'Rourke, that'll die game, annyhow, if it has to come till that same," he muttered, grinding his teeth together, and pacing his narrow cell to and fro, like a wild beast in his cage.

Then he called aloud to the jailor, asking what all the noise was about; but no one came to answer his inquiry.

"I wish," said Ronald Heath, "that I were able to run down there and see what it is all about."

"I'm glad to have you kept out of it," said his grandmother; "it seems to be always the innocent lookers-on that get hurt in time of a riot."

"The impulse to seek the scene o' excitement is vary natural to most folk, I think," remarked McAllister—"to those o' the male sex at least; but unless ane is likely to be o' use in aiding the right, it's far wiser to stay away."

As by common consent they had all left the dining-room for the porch, and there they remained—too much excited to think of eating—listening intently to the yells and cries till the last of them had died away. Then they went through the form of taking their meal, but with scant appetite for the food, though it was well prepared and savory.

McAllister was just saying, as they rose from the table, "I'll gang doun to the toun now an' find out what's been goin' on there," when a horseman dashed up to the gate and dismounted.

"Warren!" exclaimed Ronald, catching sight of his friend through the open window; "he's brought us the news."

He hurried out as he spoke, all the others following, in the general anxiety to learn the cause of the unusual commotion in the town.

Charlton fastened his horse, opened the gate, and hastened up the path, meeting Ronald about half-way to the house.

The latter spoke first. "What news, Warren?"

"Dreadful! most dreadful!" he cried, passing his hand over his brow, like one half-stunned by some sudden calamity.

"So we feared from the strange and ominous sounds that have reached us. Come into the porch and take a seat, while you tell us all about it," said Ronald, leading the way.

Charlton followed, shook hands in silence with Mrs. Heath and Miriam, then sat down, the family grouping themselves about him.

He was very pale and seemed much agitated. "Yes," he sighed, "an awful thing has happened in Prairieville, our own town; two souls have been hurried into eternity without a moment of time for preparation."

"Murder?" asked Ronald, in a low, awe-struck tone.

"Murder and lynching. Bangs shot Barney Nolan down dead in the street without the slightest excuse for it, except that he was in a towering passion about something—nobody knows what—and—"

"Was lynched for it?" queried McAllister, as the captain paused in his story.

"Yes; he did not live many minutes after the mob got hold of him."

Hardly conscious why he did so, Charlton glanced at Miriam with the last words; their eyes met, and he saw a look of keenest anguish come into hers, a deathly pallor suddenly overspread her features.

The pang that sight caused him was sharp as a dagger's thrust. "Could it be possible that she cared for Bangs? a man so utterly devoid of principle or honor, so hot-tempered, wicked, and cruel? that she could have cherished a feeling of love for one so base, so utterly unworthy of her?" The idea seemed preposterous; yet

what else could explain her strong emotion on hearing of his death?

The others, occupied with what he was saying, did not notice Miriam's emotion.

"Lynched! what does that mean?" asked Bertie, in wide-eyed wonder.

"Never mind, dear," said his grandmother, rising in some haste and leading him and Olive away; "children can't understand these things. It's all over now, and we'll think and talk of something else."

"Yes; Mrs. Heath is right," Charlton observed, in a low voice; "and the details are sickening; hardly fit for any but men's ears."

At that Miriam also rose and went quietly away to seek again the privacy of her own room. Closing the door, she threw herself face down upon the bed, pressing both hands upon her temples. Her brain was in a whirl of contending emotions, in which, for the moment, a feeling as if she were partly responsible for Bangs's awful end was uppermost.

"Oh, did I call down vengeance upon his head?" she moaned, half aloud; "would he have been slain if I had not cried to God for deliverance from him? O God, Thou knowest I did not desire his death; and Thou hast said, 'Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee.' I thank Thee for the deliverance, but oh, in what a fearful manner it has been wrought!"

Charlton was going on with his story to Ronald and McAllister. His office was in a room in the second story of a building directly opposite the brewery in which Bangs had sought a hiding-place. He was writing there, he said, when Bangs fired the shot that killed Barney, and starting up at the sound, went to the window, from which he saw all that followed without becoming a participator in the doings of the mob.

"It was horrible!" exclaimed Ronald, upon the conclusion of the narrative, "yet one can't help feeling that he deserved his fate for his unprovoked murder of a man like Barney—a decent, respectable man, and with a family to support; a good-natured, harmless fellow, so far as I can judge from what I have seen of him."

"Yes, sir; Barney Nolan was a' that," said McAllister; "he's been employed aboot the farm here lang enough for me to mak' sure o' that."

Charlton lingered some time longer, hoping for another glimpse of Miriam, but she did not rejoin them, and finally he said good-evening and went away.

"Where is Miriam?" asked Mrs. Heath, joining Ronald on the porch.

"I don't know, grandma," he answered, in some surprise; "I thought she was with you."

"No; I left her here. Perhaps she has gone to see Nora. Oh, what an awful thing for that

poor woman to have her husband shot down in that sudden, cruel way!"

"Yes; one cannot wonder at the exasperation of the public; and considering the impossibility of meting out to the murderer his deserved punishment, through the agency of the law, I can hardly blame them for lynching him; but dragging him through the streets, bumping his head on the cobble-stones, was, to say the least, unnecessary cruelty."

"Did they do that, Ronald? Oh, how horrible!"

At that moment Miriam joined them, taking a chair between her grandmother and brother. Her face was very pale, and she had evidently been weeping a good deal.

Ronald noted it with surprise and concern. "My dear sister," he said, kindly, "don't distress yourself about this dreadful occurrence. Why should you? Bangs was no friend to you."

"No; but—it is almost more dreadful to me because he was—an enemy, and— Oh, you do not know that it was I who angered him so that he shot poor Barney down! Oh, poor, poor Nora! What will she ever do?" she added, with a bitter sob; "and I—I feel as if I had killed them both."

"Oh, Miriam, you are too sensible a girl to think anything of the kind!" exclaimed Ronald. "You did not give Bangs his dreadful temper,

or put Barney in his way ; nor were you the cause of the enmity between them."

" Oh, you don't know all !" cried Miriam ; " I have been keeping some things from you and grandmother, because—because I didn't want to distress you ; but now I'll tell you all !"

Then she went on to give a full account of Bangs's efforts to induce her to consent to become his wife, including his threats, founded on the fact that he had got the mortgage on Lakeside into his possession, and all that had passed between them at that day's interview ; also the fury of passion he was in when he left her.

She told also of her cry to God for deliverance out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man, and how, because of that, she felt almost that she had helped to bring him to his fearful end.

" Mirry, my child," her grandmother said, with emotion, and laying a hand affectionately upon the young girl's arm, " do not be distressed with any such feeling ; you have no reason to blame yourself ; you but obeyed the command, ' Call upon Me in the day of trouble ;' which was right, wise, and your duty, and God took His own way to answer your prayer.

" If Mr. Bangs had been a diligent Bible student he might have known he had great reason to fear some such fate, if he persisted in so oppressing the widow and orphans ; because

in the Book of Exodus we read, ' Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto Me, I will surely hear their cry ; and My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword.' "

There was a moment of silence, then Ronald said, " What a fearful threat ! And it seems to have been very speedily fulfilled in Bangs's case ; though it may be that other helpless ones have been crying to God for relief from his oppressions for years. I have heard it asserted that much of his wealth was obtained by fraud and oppression of the weak and helpless ; but in any event, Mirry, I am sure you need not feel that any blame attaches to you ; it is a morbid feeling that I trust will soon pass away."

" And you are delivered out of his hands. You should thank God for that, Miriam ; we all should," remarked the old lady, taking her granddaughter's hand and pressing it tenderly in hers.

Dr. Jasper's arrival just at that time prevented a reply from Miriam. He, too, was full of the fearful events of the last few hours ; had come directly from the scene of anguish in Barney Nolan's home, where Nora and the children were weeping over the dead body of the husband and father. The good doctor's eyes filled, and his voice trembled with emotion as he went on to describe the grief and despair of the new-

made widow and orphans, and his listeners wept in sympathy.

"My heart bleeds for them," said Mrs. Heath; "yet if Bangs had left a wife, her case would, I think, be more pitiable still, knowing that her husband so richly deserved his fate."

"I quite agree with you in that," the doctor said; "but I believe he has left no nearer relative or connection than that sister of his, Mrs. Wiley."

"I should think it enough to make her insane," said Ronald. "How she must be feeling now!"

"She is out of town," said the doctor, "and I presume has not yet heard of the fearful events of to-day."

"She inherits her brother's property, I suppose," remarked Ronald, musingly, "and will, therefore, become the holder of the mortgage on our home."

"Are you in trouble about that?" Dr. Jasper asked, in a tone of friendly sympathy and concern.

"Yes, sir; we fear there is danger of foreclosure, should the holder be so inclined; for we lack the means to pay off even the interest that is due."

"Don't be uneasy; I trust that danger may be readily averted," returned the doctor, cheerily; "doubtless the money to pay off the whole indebtedness can be borrowed, the lender being

secured by a new mortgage; and I dare say Captain Charlton will be able to arrange the business for you in a satisfactory manner, finding a mortgagee who will not care to hurry you unduly for payment."

The faces about him grew brighter at his words.

"I wonder I had not thought of that before," exclaimed Ronald.

"You are kind, very kind, doctor," said Mrs. Heath. "'A friend in need is a friend indeed.'"

"Ah, my dear madam, advice is cheap," he said; "when not professional," he added, laughingly. "I shall speak to Charlton, and we will see what can be done." Then, as he rose to go, "Ah, I had nearly forgotten! Miss Miriam, Serena bade me give you this," drawing from his pocket a note written on tinted paper, and directed in a delicate female hand. "You will not find it a doleful missive," he went on, a joyous look coming into his eyes; "the dark and threatening cloud that overshadowed us has passed away, and we are again rejoicing in the sunlight; for which I trust we are sincerely grateful to the Giver of all good."

"Ah, I am very, very glad for you both!" Miriam exclaimed, and the others united their congratulations with hers.

"We have all felt for you and your sweet wife, doctor," said the dear old lady, "and are

rejoiced that she is not to be torn from you. Golding has relinquished his claim and consented to leave you undisturbed?"

"Yes; after standing out against the measure for a time that seemed very long to us, he finally agreed to unite with Serena in asking for a divorce; and under the circumstances the judge was able to grant it without bringing the matter into court. Then Serena and I were quietly remarried, and Golding has gone, leaving his son with us; for which I am most thankful, for I think it would have killed Serena to be deprived of either of her children."

"How happened it that you were so strangely deceived in regard to Mr. Golding's death?" asked Mrs. Heath.

"I believe it was a cousin of the same name whose death was reported to Serena as that of her husband. I presume there was no intentional deceit; but it cannot be denied that Golding was greatly to blame in absenting himself so long from home, and never during all that time attempting any communication with his wife. Besides, even before that he had given her Bible grounds for divorce. So that my conscience is entirely clear in asserting my claim to be superior to his," he concluded, his countenance beaming with satisfaction.

"I think it well may be, and that Golding's conduct has been very cruel from first to last," remarked Mrs. Heath.

"Yes," assented the doctor, with a sigh. "Ah, well, I must try to make it up to her during the rest of our two lives!"

With that he took his departure, and Miriam opened her note. It was written in a most cheerful strain, asking her sympathy in the writer's joy over her deliverance from the great trial of the last few weeks.

"My dear," she wrote, "if ever you are in sore distress, cry to the Lord for deliverance, as I did, and He will surely hear. 'In His favor is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'"

The thought comforted Miriam. "Shall it not be so with me also, and even with poor Nora?" she asked herself, with a feeling of partial relief and hopefulness, as she refolded the note and put it in her pocket.

"Grandmother," she said, aloud, "will you go with me to see poor Nora? You will, I am sure, know how to speak a word of comfort to her."

"Yes," Mrs. Heath said, rising; "I can at least repeat to her some of the precious Bible promises to the widow and the fatherless; and we will carry them something to eat. The children will be hungry, even if grief deprives the mother of her appetite."

The night that followed that day was to Miriam the longest and saddest she had ever known in all her young, healthful life. Her

heart was sore for Nora in her overwhelming grief and despair, and full of horror at the remembrance of Bangs's crime and the fearful retribution that had so speedily overtaken him.

She slept little till toward morning, and in consequence rose somewhat later than her usual hour. Hastening down-stairs to begin the duties of the day, she met McAllister in the lower hall.

"Gude-mornin', Miss Mirry. The captain left this as he was ridin' by a few moments since, biddin' me give it to you," he said, handing her a note.

In spite of a determined effort to seem unconcerned, Miriam felt her cheeks flush hotly as she took the missive and glanced at the address, unmistakably in Charlton's handwriting.

"You should have asked the captain to come in and take breakfast with us, Sandy," she said.

"I urged the hospitalities o' the hoose upon him, Miss Mirry," was the reply, "but he was no to be persuaded. However, he said something aboot givin' you a call in the course o' the mornin'."

Ronald joined them at that moment with a bright "Good-morning, Mirry. Who's that intends to call on us to-day?"

"The captain wants to see your sister, sir," said McAllister; but Miriam had slipped away, hiding the note in the bosom of her dress as she went.

"He does!" exclaimed Ronald, with laughing eyes. "Well, I for one shall make him welcome to see her—in my presence or alone."

Sandy did not mention the note, shrewdly guessing that silence upon that matter would be more pleasing to Miriam.

She seemed slightly abstracted during breakfast, and took an early opportunity after leaving the table to steal away by herself to learn in solitude what Warren had to say to her.

Her heart fluttered and the rose on her cheek deepened as she broke the seal and glanced at the contents of his note; then with an exclamation of astonishment she hurried to the dining-room, where she had left her grandmother and Ronald consulting together about some work to be done in the garden.

"Why, Mirry, what now? What has happened that you look so excited?" asked her brother, as she came in with the note open in her hand.

"Something so wonderful that I can hardly believe it," she answered, dropping into a chair, her eyes shining, her breath coming half pantingly. "I—I've had a small fortune left me!"

"Can it be possible!" exclaimed Ronald. "Where in the world does it come from?"

"Listen," she said, and went on to read the letter aloud; merely a business one it was, informing her that the late Mr. Himes had made a will shortly before his death, bequeathing to

her—Miriam Heath—all his earthly possessions, consisting principally of the money he had received for his farm and some United States bonds, amounting in all to $10,000.

He had told Captain Charlton that he had no near relative or friend—no one to whom he cared to leave anything ; and having a high estimate of Miriam's worth, and a great admiration for what he called her pluck and enterprise, he had selected her for his heir in preference to any one else.

" There," cried the excited girl, waving the letter above her head, " it will be more than enough to save the place and stock the farm, too, with all the cattle we want !"

" But, Mirry, it is left to you personally ; not to us as a family," said Ronald.

" Well, what of that ? What do I want with money, except to save the dear home for us all ?" she cried, half indignantly, half in exultation.

" Dear, unselfish child !" her grandmother exclaimed, gazing at her through tear-dimmed eyes ; " but we must not let you rob yourself."

" You needn't be one bit afraid I shall do that, granny dear," Miriam cried, springing to her feet and throwing her arms about the old lady's neck ; " I'll be sure to look out for number one."

" When are you going to begin so doing, sister mine ?" asked Ronald, with a good-humored laugh.

Bertie and Olive came running in from the garden with the announcement that the captain was coming.

"To see you, Mirry," added Ronald, roguishly. "I presume he wishes a private interview. Let me beg of you to treat him well for my sake. Just think what a friend he has been to me!"

"He comes on this business of the will, I presume," returned Miriam, blushing, "and I shall want you and grandmother to be present."

"Then I'll ask him into the sitting-room," Ronald said, giving her a smiling, mischievous look as he hastened away to receive his friend.

Charlton did not ask for a private interview, or seem to have come upon any other errand than the matter of the will. What he had to say was said in the presence of Mrs. Heath and Ronald.

He told them there was apparently nothing in the way of Miriam's taking immediate possession of the property. It was possible the widow might come forward to put in a claim to her thirds, but not probable, as she was doubtless keeping herself in concealment for fear of being put upon her trial on a charge of complicity in the first attempt upon the old man's life, he having many times strongly asserted that she was guilty.

"And," added Charlton, "there is no doubt

that she was an old flame of the would-be murderer, Phelim O'Rourke, or that they were often together when the old husband was absent from home."

"What news do you bring us from town this morning?" asked Ronald. "What has been done with Bangs's body?"

"Wiley, his brother-in-law, had it taken down last night and buried as privately as possible, lest there should be some interference on the part of the lynchers; though I do not, myself, think he need have had any such apprehension, they being fully satisfied, I have no doubt, with having inflicted the death penalty for his crimes."

"Do you approve of capital punishment, captain?" asked Mrs. Heath.

"Yes, madam, I do," he said, emphatically; "first, because God commands it—'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed'—and, secondly, because its abolition gives encouragement to those inclined to commit murder—from enmity or for gain—and leads to lynching in cases where the indignation of the community is so aroused by the enormity of a crime, or a series of crimes, that they feel that the criminal must be sent where he can no longer harm his fellows, and that nothing short of the death penalty is an adequate reward for his misdeeds."

"I agree with you," returned Mrs. Heath;

" it is not worth while for man to try to be wiser or more merciful than his Maker."

" Where is the command to which you have referred ?" asked Ronald. " Do not those who are opposed to capital punishment assert that it was a part of the Levitical law, and that therefore the obligation to obey it has passed away ?"

" Some do," said Charlton, " but it must be from ignorance of the time when the command was given, and to whom. It is found in the ninth chapter of Genesis, fifth and sixth verses.

" The fact that it was given to Noah just after the flood shows that it is binding upon all mankind ; for Noah was the progenitor of all races of men now living upon the face of the earth. Some opposers of capital punishment say, to be sure, that the words are to be understood in the sense of a prediction, not a command ; but to my mind it is very clear that they are the latter. Let me read you the passage," he continued, taking up a Bible that lay on a table near which he was seated, and turning over its pages.

" Do ; we shall be glad to hear it," answered Mrs. Heath ; and he complied.

" ' And surely your blood of your lives will I require : at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man ; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed ; for in the image of God made He man.' "

Closing the book, "Is it not a plain command?" he asked; "and being, as I have already remarked, given to him by whose descendants the whole earth was to be peopled—given hundreds of years before Abraham, the progenitor of the Jews, was born—it is evidently not merely a part of the Levitical law, but is to this day as binding as ever upon all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike.

"It is a dangerous thing," he went on, "for men to disregard any law of God; probably yesterday's lynching would not have occurred had not the outraged community felt that there was no hope of justice upon the criminal through the operation of the law of the State; and I fear we may be going to have more of the same kind of work; the popular feeling against O'Rourke is very strong all up and down the valley."

"Do you think there will be an attempt to lynch him?" asked Ronald, while the faces of the two ladies turned pale with apprehension.

"I hope not, but I certainly fear it," replied the captain; "there are angry mutterings in the air that seem to presage a coming storm."

There was a pause in the conversation, broken by Ronald. "I quite agree with you, Warren, in what you have been saying about the mischievous tendency of abolishing capital punishment; mercy to the few (that is, mercy to those whom the law of God adjudges to death for having destroyed the lives of their fellow-crea-

tures) is cruelty to the many, because it, as you have said, takes away the wholesome fear that often deters wicked and unscrupulous men from murders they are moved to commit from covetousness or a desire for revenge.

"But do you not think that beside the evil, of which we have just been speaking, there are others at work in the same direction?"

"Yes; I have in mind two others which are, I presume, the very ones to which you refer. One is the practice by criminal lawyers of delaying or entirely frustrating the execution of the law when they know their client to be guilty; and not only guilty, but unrepentant; taking advantage, for that purpose, of some trivial technicality that has no bearing whatever upon the question of the prisoner's guilt.

"The higher courts, too, that for like insufficient reasons reverse the righteous decisions of the lower, give encouragement to crime.

"The other evil, working in the same direction, is the mawkish sentimentality of certain weak-minded people, that leads them to make heroes and martyrs of the most depraved and guilty of men, the most heartless and desperate of criminals. Red-handed murderers seem to be their especial favorites, to be visited, feasted upon dainties, loaded with choice flowers, pitied and pleaded for, that they may be spared the due reward of their deeds; perhaps set free to repeat them."

"I blush for my sex when I hear how some of them pet and pamper the vilest criminals, the most heartless, ruffianly murderers, simply because justice has overtaken them and they are in prison," remarked Miriam. "They, the silly sentimentalists, seem to lose all remembrance of the pain and misery endured by the wretched victims of the criminals, in weak, not to say wicked, commiseration for the richly deserved pains and penalties the assassins have brought upon themselves."

CHAPTER XVII.

BELINDA HIMES was still in hiding in the cave on the river-bank where she had taken refuge at the first. She found it a doleful abode, but scarcely dared venture from it except under cover of the night, when with the owl and the bat she sallied forth from her lair to prowl about the country in search of food. The supply she had taken with her from the raft had long since become exhausted, and she was on the verge of starvation.

Thus pressed by hunger, she visited fields, gardens, and hen-roosts by night, appropriating to her own use such eggs, vegetables, and fruits as she could lay hands upon and carry away—sometimes even going so far as to abstract a young chicken.

Fortunately there were fish in the river, and having found rod, line, and a hook or two on the raft, she was able occasionally to catch one. So she managed to keep soul and body together, yet not very much more than that.

It was a dreadful life she led—a life filled with terror, remorse, and despair. Afraid to be seen by mortal eye, she crouched in her dark, damp, unwholesome den through the long,

bright summer days, shut away from all the beauty and fragrance that gladdened the hearts and lives of those whom sin and crime did not compel to hide from the light of the sun, and away from the companionship of their kind.

Oh, how wearily the days and nights dragged along! Life under such conditions seemed little worth, yet death a thing to shrink from in wild affright.

She saw no one and knew nothing of passing events. She supposed her husband was still living, and wondered if, when he should be able to be about again, he would make an effort to find her, and have her brought to trial for the crime of which he had accused her.

She thought much of Phelim, and longed to see and talk with him; but it did not seem likely they would ever meet again; if convicted, he would doubtless be given a long term in the penitentiary; perhaps it would be a life sentence. She was glad it could be nothing worse; hanging was, to her way of thinking, far more to be dreaded.

She would have gone to Prairieville and to the jail, seeking an interview with him, could she have done so with safety to herself; but she dared not, lest she should be made to share his imprisonment, both there and in the State prison.

One day—the same on which Captain Charlton carried to Miriam the news that Himes had

made a will in her favor—Belinda, lying asleep in her cave, was awakened by the sound of voices at the foot of the bank. She started with affright, a cold perspiration bursting out all over her, and her heart beating wildly. She thought they were climbing up to her retreat; perhaps had dogged her steps as she returned to it some hours before, and had come to arrest her.

But after listening intently for a few minutes, she decided that they were stationary; probably seated near the water's edge and engaged in fishing, which was indeed the case.

Then she lay down again with her ear close to the overhanging vines, that she might catch every word of their talk.

They were speaking of Mr. Himes, and as she listened with breathless interest, she presently learned of the second and successful attempt upon his life. She drew a breath of relief, as she remembered that he would have been the principal witness against Phelim.

But what were they saying now? That Phelim was suspected of having instigated the murder, and that there was talk of lynching him, as Bangs had been lynched only the day before for shooting Barney Nolan down dead.

Horrible! horrible! She was almost wild with terror on Phelim's account. Oh, if she could only warn him! if she could only help him to escape from the jail before the lynchers got there!

Alas! that was impossible; but perhaps there would be no attempt to harm him, and if she were in that neighborhood she might go near to the jail in the night, when his keepers would be asleep, and in some way attract his attention, so that he would come to his cell window and speak to her. She would venture a good deal even to hear his voice.

She fell asleep while thinking of it, for she was weary with the wanderings of the past night, and must wait for the sheltering wing of darkness before setting out upon the contemplated journey; and she had no preparation to make in the way of packing, except to gather together her few possessions into a small bundle that she could carry in her hand.

She rested through the remainder of the day, and when the sunset glow had faded from the sky, and darkness began creeping over the landscape, crawled from her hiding-place and started upon her toilsome tramp, following the course of the river, which she knew would finally bring her to her destination.

There was a more direct route, but she was not acquainted with it, and dared not make inquiries.

Feeble from mental suffering and lack of sufficient nourishment, she could not travel fast. Two nights of journeying, lying by during the days, brought her at last to the vicinity of Prairieville.

Day was breaking when she arrived. She

lay concealed in the woods through that day and evening, till nearly every light in the town was extinguished, excepting the street lamps, then made her way cautiously to the jail, which stood upon the outskirts, partly surrounded by a grove of trees.

All was darkness and silence there ; probably keeper and prisoners were asleep.

Slowly she made the circuit of the building, gazing up at the grated windows and trying to conjecture which was the one belonging to Phelim's cell.

She possessed no clew to it, and even could she decide which it was, how was she to attract his attention without betraying her vicinity to others ?

Suddenly she remembered that she could imitate very closely the note of the katydid, and that Phelim had once heard her doing so, and complimented her on the accomplishment. She tried it now, stationing herself opposite a cell window, which, as it happened, was the one she sought.

She had repeated the note several times, when at last it was answered in kind ; then a voice, speaking in suppressed tones, asked, " Is it yersilf, me darlint ?"

" Yes, it's me, Phalim," she replied, in a joyous whisper, stepping close under the window as she spoke. " Oh, if I could only help you out o' that !"

"Who knows but mabbe ye kin in toime, me jewel," he said. "We'll set our wits to wurruk, me darlint. If I had a file now, to hilp me to git rid o' wan or two o' these bars, it's not so hard 'twud be to break jail. Thin we'd fly the counthry together, an' lave throuble behind us."

"I'd risk anything to help you," she responded, "but how or where I could get a file I don't see, for I daren't venture to show myself to a livin' soul."

"Is that so, me jewel? But what fer darsen't ye?"

"Because he swore I'd a hand in robbin' an' murderin' him."

"Who? that ould divil Himes? Well, he's out o' the way now."

"Yes; but maybe they'll arrest me an' try me fer it, anyhow."

"Bangs'll git ye off if they do," he said, with a low chuckle. "He's promised to bring me off wid flyin' colors."

"But—but—he—he's dead—Bangs is; they've lynched him, don't ye know?"

"Niver heard a wurrud o' it. Whan?"

"Four days ago."

"An' that's the fuss they wuz makin' down the strate whan I heerd 'em shoutin' an' yellin', loike so manny divils! I axed the jailor what all the noise wuz about, but he answered me niver a wurrud—jist walked away wid his head

up an' his mouth toight shut. An' here I've been a wonderin' an' scoldin' bekase Bangs didn't show hisself an' lat me know how the bizniss was progressin' ; how fast he wuz gittin' ready to prove till the coort an' jury that Phalim O'Rourke wuz as innercent o' that attimpt on the ould man's loife as an unborn babby."

" But he's dead, and who'll clear ye now?" she asked, mournfully.

" I'll have to break jail, an' ye must help me, B'lindy."

" If I only could," she said, and her voice was weak and trembling ; " but I'm half dead now ; I can hardly stand fer weakness. I've been hidin' in a damp, dark, dirty cave—the one you told me of—an' I'm nearly starved ; haven't had enough to eat since—since that night on the raft. If 'twas light enough for you to see me, you'd never know me ; I'm wasted to skin an' bone, an' my clo'es are all rags an' dirt."

" Did I iver hear the loike!" he exclaimed. " Well, niver moind, me jewel ; whan I'm a free man agin I'll soon have ye a wearin' yer foine silks an' satins an' goold ornamints, an' drivin' in yer kerridge, mabbe, loike anny lady in the land."

She sighed despairingly. " But you'll never be able to break out o' this ; an' there's nobody now to defend ye on yer trial. They say 'twas

some o' your band that finished Himes ; they say 'twas by your orderin'. Is that so?"

"Mabbe," he chuckled ; "the byes knowed me moind on that p'int ; an' they knowed the ould divil wad be the wan to swear away me liberty, if he'd a chance ; but dead men tells no tales."

"I wisht they'd let him live," she sighed ; "'twould have been better fer you."

Then she went on to tell him what she had overheard the men at the river say about the probability of an attempt to lynch him.

While this talk was going on at the jail window, a wagon filled with masked and armed men was driving toward the town from the direction of Fairfield, another along the road leading from Frederic, a third coming from Riverside, while a fourth waited at the bridge over the river at Prairieville, where the other three presently joined it. Then falling into line, they drove up the street that led to the jail.

As they neared the building the creaking of their wheels struck upon Belinda's ear.

"Oh, what's that?" she cried, in startled tones, though half under her breath. "Wagons —one, two, three, four—and stoppin' right out there, every one of 'em!"

"So they are, an' all's up wid me!" cried Phelim, hoarsely, adding a volley of oaths, as he grasped the bars and shook them fiercely in the frantic but vain effort to wrench them off.

The men were already alighting and pouring into the jail yard; then came a thundering knock upon the outer door, accompanied by a demand for instant admittance.

The trembling pair at the cell window were still listening, Phelim clinging to the bars, Belinda leaning heavily against the outer wall, while her heart beat almost to suffocation and her breath came gaspingly. They heard a second-story window raised and the jailor's voice in parley with the would-be intruders.

"What is wanted, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Admittance; come down and open the door," answered the spokesman of the party.

"We don't admit visitors at this time o' night," said the jailor.

"Come down and open the door, or we'll break it in," was the response, in a tone of fierce determination.

"Who are you?" asked the jailor.

"Himes's avengers. Give the murderer into our hands, and we ask nothing more."

"Can't do it, gentlemen. He's been committed to my care by the officers of the law, and I've no right to give him up to any one else."

"We don't offer you any choice in the matter; you'll open to us and give him up, or we'll break in and take him in spite of you."

Again the jailor refused to accede to their demand; then thundering blows of axes and

hammers wielded by strong arms fell fast and thick on the door, the noise resounding through the building and striking terror to every hearer within its walls.

At length the door gave way, the assailants poured into the hall and seized the jailor, who had come down, lamp in hand, and would have tried to persuade them to resign their purpose; but they would not hear a word from him. As he refused to give up his keys, they bound him hand and foot and took forcible possession of them, then hastened to the cell wherein their intended victim was confined.

The noise of the struggle with the jailor, the tramp of heavy feet traversing the corridors, the fitting of the key in the lock of the cell door, all reached the ears of Phelim and Belinda, causing both their hearts to quake with terror. Belinda held her breath to listen, while trembling so that she could scarce keep from falling to the ground.

The heavy door of the cell swung back, and for a moment the little apartment was flooded with light from a lamp held high in the hand of one of the masked intruders.

He stood aside while four or five of his company filed rapidly in, and laid hold of the prisoner with no gentle hands.

Phelim saw at a glance that resistance was useless. With a face pale as death, eyes almost ready to start from their sockets, quivering

lips, and in a tone that he vainly endeavored to make steady and defiant, "What are yees afther, sors?" he demanded. "Yees haven't anny roight to be comin' in here, fer I'm undher the pertection o' the law."

But even while he spoke they had pinioned his arms, and now surrounding him, they led him out through the corridors, the outer door, the jail-yard, and into the grove, where they halted with him under a large oak-tree.

A man was seated on its largest branch with a rope in his hand, one end of which he had already attached to the limb; at the other was a noose, which was quickly adjusted about Phelim's neck; then he was forced to mount into a wagon that had been driven up under the tree.

He kicked, cursed, and swore fearful oaths, but found resistance vain; strong hands pulled, pushed, and lifted him into the vehicle and held him there.

"Now," said a stern voice, "you have but five minutes to live; better stop cursing and spend your breath in prayer."

"Yees are murtherin' me; ye're goin' further nor the law o' the State, black-hearted scoundrels that ye are!" he cried, fiercely.

"You are receiving the due reward of your deeds," answered the voice. "The minutes are going; better spend your last breath in an effort to save your soul."

The curses died on the lips of the ruffian ; he looked up at the starlit sky, down and around on the crowd of dark figures and masked faces.

" Gintlemen, hain't none o' yees got no pity fer the ould mither and faythe that hasn't niver a sowl to wurruk fer 'em an' suppoort 'em in their fable ould age, barrin' their only son as stands here wid a rope round his neck?" he asked.

" A son who has supported them by robbery and murder !" cried the same stern voice that had spoken before. " The time is up. Your blood be on your own head !" it added, and at a signal the wagon moved from under the culprit, and left him dangling high in air, the noose tightening about his neck.

The stern executioners stood watching him by the light of their lanterns till fully satisfied that life was extinct, then crowded into their wagons and drove away as they had come.

At the moment of their entrance into the cell Belinda staggered back into the shadow of a tree, at some little distance from the one they had selected as a gallows, from which, in an agony of woe, she witnessed the whole dreadful scene. She was in terror for herself, lest she might be made to share Phelim's fate, yet that fear was almost swallowed up for the time in the anguish of grief for him that wrung her heart, as she looked upon the tragedy that ended the earthly life of the man she still

loved, deeply dyed villain though she knew him to be.

She clung to the tree for support, while eye and ear were intent to catch every expression of his countenance and tone of his voice. But the flickering light of the lanterns gave her only fitful glimpses of his features, and the oaths and curses that fell from his lips were not such words as even she would desire to treasure up in her memory, for they inspired her with no hope that he was going to a better and happier world.

When she saw the wagon driven from under him, and knew that the deed was accomplished, she fell in a heap at the foot of the tree to which she had been clinging, and knew nothing more till roused to consciousness by the sound of the wheels of the departing vehicles.

Feebly she raised herself to a sitting posture, then glanced fearfully around till fully convinced that the self-constituted executioners were gone not to return; then, getting upon her feet like one who had scarce strength to move, she dragged herself to the other tree, where the body was hanging.

It was swaying slowly in the night wind.

"Phelim!" she cried, hoarsely—"Phelim, speak to me! Oh, it can't be that ye'll never speak again! Yes, he's dead; they'd never leave him till they was sure o' that! Oh, me heart's broke! I ain't got nothin' to live fer

no more! I might's well a let 'em hang me, too!" and weeping, shuddering, tottering with weakness, she crept away to her hiding-place in the woods.

She had no bed but the ground, no covering save the starry canopy of heaven; she had no earthly friend, and had never cared to seek the friendship of that One "who sticketh closer than a brother."

How utterly lonely and desolate she felt as she lay moaning and groaning upon her hard couch, weeping as if she would weep her very life away, longing to lay down the burdens and sorrows of life, yet shrinking in unspeakable terror from the thought of death.

Some words that she had heard, she knew not when or where, kept sounding in her ears, "The way of transgressors is hard." "The wages of sin is death." How the truth of those inspired declarations had been verified in Bangs's case, in Phelim's, and in her own!

CHAPTER XVIII.

TWO days after the death of Bangs, Mr. Wiley went for his wife, who was visiting acquaintances a day's journey from home.

He shrank from the task of telling her the story of the dreadful scenes enacted in Prairieville during her absence, but the tidings had preceded him, and he found her lying on a couch in strong hysterics.

She greeted him with bitter reproaches—"Why had he not exerted himself to save poor, dear Avery from the fury of the mob?"

"I couldn't," he said; "you might just as reasonably ask me why I do not prevent the lightning from striking where it will."

"Don't talk in that way to me!" she cried, in passionate tones; "you didn't try; you didn't make the slightest effort; the papers would have said so if you had; you were too great a coward to lift a finger to save him."

"Have it your own way," he returned, gloomily; "it's a thousand pities you were not there to quell the fury of the mob, and turn them from so many tigers, thirsting for blood, into lambs; you could have done it, of course; there's nothing you can't do, except treat your

husband decently," he added, with bitter emphasis.

It pleased her to ignore that last clause of his reply.

" I'd have tried, anyhow," she said ; " I'd have helped him to escape from them. Where is he now ?"

" You are as capable of deciding that question as I," he answered, turning away with a slight shudder.

" You misunderstand me wilfully," she said, her eyes flashing with anger. " I want to know what you have done with his body."

" Buried it," he returned, laconically.

" Buried it ? without consulting me ! without letting me know ! without giving me time to attend the funeral ! How dared you, Amos Wiley !"

" I thought that, under the peculiar circumstances, the best thing to be done was to put the body into the ground as quietly and with as little fuss as possible ; and he would not have been a pleasant sight for you to look upon."

" What do you mean, Amos Wiley ?" she demanded, starting up to a sitting posture and regarding him with looks of fury and indignation ; " that you had no funeral services, but gave him, my brother, the burial of a dog ?"

" I had no thought of that," he said ; " I laid him away decently and quietly, that was all. I did not suppose you would feel like having a

funeral, considering how the neighbors and all the townspeople must have regarded his death, and—and the cause of it."

"You mean that they thought him disgraced, and that I'd feel ashamed of him and of—of what he did, and the way he lost his life? No such thing! I consider him a martyr, and should have gloried in showing everybody that I thought so."

He gave her a look of utter astonishment.

"You needn't look at me so!" she cried. "He killed that impudent Irishman in self-defence; I know he did!"

"Self-defence! The man was doing nothing but walking peaceably along the street behind him, attending to his own business."

"Were you alongside? Did you see and hear it all?"

"No; but there were credible witnesses who did; and if the shooting had not been so unprovoked, the bystanders would not have become the furious mob that they instantly did. I tell you, Dora, you had best keep quiet about the whole affair, and, in fact, I think it may be our wisest course to move away to some distant part of the country, where the story will not be likely to follow us."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," she said. "It would be a losing business to sell out our property in Prairieville and go to a new place. 'A rolling stone gathers no moss.' I'll go

home; we'll start directly, and I'll let the neighbors see that I don't feel myself in the least disgraced by what has passed."

They reached Prairieville in the evening of the same day that Belinda arrived in the vicinity. Early the next morning Mr. Wiley went down-town on some errand. Returning half an hour later, he appeared before his wife with a ghastly and disturbed countenance.

"What are we coming to?" he sighed, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "There was—another lynching—last night; armed, masked men—four wagon loads of them—broke into the jail, took Phelim O'Rourke and hung him to a tree right there alongside of the building; and his body's swinging there yet, they say. I believe they are about taking it down, however, and home to the old folks. They've held an inquest, and the verdict is that he came to his death by the hands of persons unknown."

"Dreadful!" she cried. "But who did it?"

"Nobody seems to know or wants to know. I've told you what the verdict of the coroner was; but it's said the best citizens of this town and Frederic, Riverside, and Fairfield had a hand in it. You see they knew the law would never hang him, and were determined he should have his deserts; not only to punish him, but to discourage other scoundrels from following his example."

"Well, I'm glad! He ought to have been

hung; if it hadn't been for him Avery would be alive to-day; but my poor brother sacrificed himself to save that miserable wretch from being sent to State prison."

"Sacrificed himself by swearing to a lie," was her husband's inward comment, but aloud he merely remarked that he pitied O'Rourke's parents.

"Yes, of course you do," snapped his wife; "you are always ready to feel for anybody but those nearest to you. You have no sympathy to waste upon May and me, but those low, vulgar Irish people are objects of the deepest commiseration."

"I have done my best to show sympathy with you and your niece, Dora," he returned; "but you are never just to your unfortunate husband."

"Unfortunate because he has me for a wife, I presume you mean," she retorted, flashing an angry glance at him. "Breakfast has been waiting for you till it must be completely spoiled. Come and eat, if you can find an appetite after such heartless treatment of your wife."

She led the way to the table, he following in silence, having learned by past experience the utter uselessness of trying to have the last word in a controversy with her.

"You don't eat as if you relished your food the least bit," she remarked, after watching him furtively for a few minutes; "but if you

don't find it palatable it's your own fault for keeping it waiting so long."

"I have no complaint to make," he answered, "but I am too sick at heart over the awful doings we've had in this town of late to feel much appetite for the daintiest of food." With that he rose and left the table and the house.

Coming in some hours later, he found his wife in what had been the private office of her brother, looking over his papers.

"I'm not exactly sure that you have a right to be at those, Dora," he remarked, in a tone of mild expostulation.

"I'd like to know who has a better!" she retorted, straightening herself with an angry, defiant look up into his face, as he came and stood at her side. "I'm Avery's nearest of kin, and therefore his heir."

"But there may be a will."

"No; there isn't. I've hunted everywhere, and there's nothing of the kind to be found."

"Still, even in that case you are not his only heir."

"I am, though; for we two were the last of the family."

"Yes; but you forget that May inherits her mother's share."

"She sha'n't! I won't hear of it! That chit of a child, indeed! She'll get it when I'm gone, if she outlives me, but I shall hold on to it till then."

'But you can't, unless there's a will leaving it all to you; for otherwise the law will give her an equal share."

"But if we don't choose to let anybody know what he has left?" she asked, frowningly, yet with some slight hesitation.

"There, now," said her husband, "don't you see why you have no right to come here alone and examine his effects?"

She opened her hand, showing a roll of bank-notes.

"This ready money I ought to have a right to take, to use for May and myself, and I'm going to do it; we need it at once to buy our mourning and other things."

He looked troubled, for though honest and upright in his dealings, he yet dreaded to oppose her will.

"Let me see those notes," he requested, holding out his hand.

She allowed him to take them, remarking as he did so, "It's quite a nice sum—considerably over a thousand dollars."

"Yes," he said, turning them about with careful scrutiny, "but—"

"What?" she asked, sharply.

"They're all marked; they're the missing notes stolen from Lakeside; I know, for I've had a particular description of them from Sandy McAllister."

"Well?"

"Of course we must restore them to the rightful owners; we wouldn't be guilty of fraud, and we couldn't use these bills without detection, even if we didn't care for the dishonesty of appropriating them."

"But that girl!" she hissed through her clinched teeth; "she rejected my brother, and I'm determined she shall be punished for it. Here's a mortgage on Lakeside," laying her hand on the paper as she spoke; "Avery bought it to have her in his power, and he told me he'd foreclose and turn them out of house and home if the saucy minx held out against his advances. Now it's my property, and I mean to foreclose without giving her any alternative; then the place will be mine, and we'll go there and live. I've always had a hankering after it; it's the prettiest place in all the region round, to my way of thinking."

"But, Dora, you couldn't really contemplate so mean, not to say dishonest a procedure?" he exclaimed, in surprise and dismay.

"Dishonest!" she cried, with rising wrath; "where's the dishonesty? Haven't I a right to foreclose and sell the property to get my money if they don't pay up their interest?"

"But they will when we hand them these bills, which we know to have been stolen from them."

"Hand them the notes and let them know they were found among Avery's possessions, and have them blackening his character—telling

that he was the thief or the receiver, that's as bad as the thief?" she exclaimed, with fury. "I'll do no such thing; I'll defend my brother's character to the last gasp!" she added, with virtuous indignation.

He turned away and paced the room back and forth for a few moments; then, returning to her side, "Dora," he said, with unwonted decision, "to keep back these notes from the rightful owners would be as bad as stealing, and I will be no party to any such dishonest dealing."

"You've nothing whatever to do with it," she interrupted, hotly.

"Unfortunately I have," he responded, "and I insist on taking to the Heaths this property, which is rightfully theirs. I shall tell them we do not know or understand how these notes happened to be found here among your brother's papers, and shall try to exact from them a promise not to reveal the fact to any one. I think I shall have no difficulty in persuading them to that."

"Then we'll lose the place," she said, grinding her teeth with rage. "I'll not consent."

"We can't lose what we never owned," he returned; "and I for one could never enjoy it if gained by means so unfair and cruel."

She continued her opposition for some time longer, but to her unbounded astonishment found him for once firm in his determination not to surrender to her will.

He presently took the notes from her unwilling hand and forthwith departed for Lakeside.

Great was the joy there when his errand was made known and accomplished. The promise he asked for was readily given, accompanied with hearty thanks for the restoration of the notes.

Then Miriam said, "Mr. Bangs told me he had bought the mortgage on our place, and now we would like to buy it of his heirs; the money is ready to be paid down at any time."

"I am glad to hear it," returned Mr. Wiley, emphatically, "and I think the matter can be arranged very shortly."

When he had taken his departure the grandmother, Miriam, and Ronald exchanged looks and words of congratulation; their hearts were full of joy.

"We must get Warren to attend to this business for us, grandmother and Mirry," Ronald said, giving his sister a mischievous, bantering look as he concluded his sentence.

"I think we could not do better," Mrs. Heath replied, turning an inquiring glance upon her granddaughter.

"I entirely agree with you, grandma," rejoined Miriam, quietly. "Suppose you write him a note stating the facts, Ronald, of course keeping back the one we have promised not to reveal."

"Certainly; with all my heart," returned

the young man. "I shall urge him to call at once and give us his opinion and advice. By the way, he hasn't been here since he came to tell you the good news in regard to Himes's will."

Miriam did not seem to hear. She had caught sight of a carriage nearing their gate, and hurried out to receive Dr. Jasper and Serena, who, she perceived, were its occupants.

These good friends were soon told of the good fortune that had come to the Lakeside family, and responded to the tidings with hearty congratulations and good wishes.

A good deal of lively, cheery chat followed, and for a short space Miriam seemed as gay as the rest, but erelong Serena noticed an expression of deep sadness steal over her speaking countenance, when for a moment the stream of talk had drifted past her, and she was unaware that any eye was regarding her.

"Miriam, my dear, won't you invite me into your garden to look at your roses?" Serena asked, with one of her winsome smiles.

"Certainly; I shall be delighted to show them," Miriam answered, a bright, pleased look taking the place of the former sorrowful one, as she rose and led the way. "The doctor may come, too, if he likes."

"No, no, he mayn't! I want you to myself for a little while," said Serena, laughingly. "Please just stay where you are, Alonzo, and

do your best to entertain Mrs. Heath and Mr. Ronald."

Roses of many beautiful varieties formed a prominent feature of the flower-garden at Lakeside. Serena went about among them exclaiming, admiring, asking questions in regard to names and the proper treatment for bringing them to perfection, but in the midst of it all turned suddenly upon her friend with the query, "What's the matter with you, my dear? Why are you sad now, when delivered from your tormentor and provided with a small fortune over and above what it will take to clear off the mortgage that has given you so much anxiety and heartache?"

"Why do you think me sad, Mrs. Serena?" returned Miriam, with playful look and tone, though a bright blush mantled her cheek.

"Oh, I have eyes," was the laconic answer.

"And do they tell you I am sad?" asked Miriam, smiling brightly.

"Not at this moment, my sweet, pretty maid; but they caught a different look a while ago from that presented to them now. Am I right in my conjecture that the course of true love does not run smooth? Pray believe, dear, that I do not ask from any vulgar curiosity, but from a sincere desire and hope to be able to give both sympathy and help," she added, taking Miriam's hand and pressing it affectionately in both of hers. "That Warren Charlton is

deeply enamored of you I am positively certain, and as he, too, is looking woebegone without apparent reason, to what other conclusion can I come than that the roughness of true love's course is making misery for you both?"

"Captain Charlton has never breathed a word of love to me," Miriam said, blushing more vividly than before, "so of course there has been no lover's quarrel between us; but surely the horrors of the last week are enough to account for a feeling of depression, especially in one who— Oh, Serena, I think you do not know that it was I who had put Bangs into such a rage that he shot poor Barney Nolan, and was lynched in consequence! Oh, I cannot yet get over the feeling that I—I am partly to blame—partly responsible for it all!" she added, averting her face, while the big tears rolled down her cheeks.

"And that was what made you look so overwhelmed when you heard the news of that lynching!" cried Serena, catching her friend in her arms and holding her close. "Ah! I knew very well it could not possibly be that you cared in the very least for that double-dyed villain and cowardly assassin; but I could not divest Warren Charlton of some slight lingering suspicion or fear that you might have had some little liking for him."

"I knew it!" cried Miriam, her eyes filling with tears of mingled grief and indignation;

"I felt how grossly he misunderstood my emotion on hearing of the awful fate of the man who was my worst enemy, and whom I so thoroughly detested. But, oh, how could he, how could he for a moment think that I could have any admiration for the man whose character you have so truly described?"

"It's a perfect shame that he should," said Serena; "but I'll set him right on that point. Oh, you needn't give me such a frightened, beseeching look, my child; I've no notion of compromising you by affording him the smallest excuse for imagining that you care for him in the least; and I'll try to impress upon him that my friend, Miriam Heath, is a prize far beyond the deserts of any man of my acquaintance, barring one who is already appropriated," she added, laughingly.

"Thank you. That is even more than I could ask," Miriam said, with a smile. "Serena, you and the doctor must stay to tea."

"Thank you, kindly, but we must hurry home on account of the children. Besides, the doctor has a call to make before tea," Mrs. Jasper answered. Then, drawing out her watch, "Ah! it is time we were off now. I must run in again and remind Alonzo."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE doctor set his wife down at their own gate, then drove on to make the call she had spoken of. Serena stood still for a moment, sending glances up and down the street, debating in her own mind whether she should or should not run over to Charlton's office, less than a square away, and say a few words that were burning on the tip of her tongue.

The question was decided for her by seeing him approaching.

"Good-evening, sir," she said, nodding and smiling; "won't you come in?"

He returned her greeting and accepted her invitation, asking, "Have you some news for me? I seem to read tidings in your face."

"Yes; I have found out to a certainty that you were wrong and I was right in that little talk we had the other day."

"Pardon me, but I am not quite sure that I understand to what you refer, my good lady," he said, lightly, following her into the porch, where she gave him a chair, taking another near at hand herself.

"I am just from Lakeside," she said, giving him a mischievous look and smile. "I've had

a private interview with my friend Miriam, and learned from her own lips that she utterly detested Bangs on account of his odious character, and that her emotion on hearing of his awful end was because he had gone directly from an interview with her, in which her firm refusal to accept the offer of his hand had put him in a towering passion, and that had led to his murder of Barney Nolan, for which, as you know, he was lynched. So poor, dear Miriam felt at the time of hearing what had happened that she was partly responsible for their deaths, and she can't even yet quite put aside the feeling."

Charlton's countenance had grown radiant.

"A thousand thanks, my dear Mrs. Jasper!" he exclaimed; "you have lifted a load from my mind, for, as I see you have already guessed, I am deeply in love with Miss Miriam. Yet, after all," he sighed, a look of doubt and uncertainty taking the place of the other, "I may fail to win the prize I so covet, for I am quite sensible that it is far beyond my deserts."

"I entirely agree with you, sir," she said, teasingly. "I know of no one (now in the market) whom I consider worthy of Miriam Heath. She is, in my estimation, a diamond of the first water."

"She is, indeed! And you would discourage me from seeking to win her?"

"No; there's nothing like trying. As far as I know she does not dislike you, and who can

tell but you might in time, by clever courting, teach her to really care for you? I will say for your consolation that I think you as worthy of her as any other unmarried man of my acquaintance."

"Thank you," he said. "You found them all well at Lakeside?"

"Yes, and rejoicing over a piece of good fortune—the recovery of the stolen notes; though where they came from is a profound secret."

She enjoyed his surprise and pleasure, and in answer to a question or two, went on to give him the whole story, adding that he was to be sent for to attend to the business arrangements for them.

"I'll go over at once and save them the trouble of sending," he said, rising. "Good-evening."

"Good-evening," she responded. "Come back and report, won't you?"

He only gave her a bow and smile, then hastened on his way.

The Lakeside family were just about to sit down to tea when he arrived, and, of course, he was invited to partake with them.

They had their business talk at the table.

On the conclusion of the meal all repaired to the porch except Miriam, who, leaving the entertainment of the guest to her grandmother and Ronald, stole quietly out into the garden, and busied herself among her flowers.

She was training a vine over a trellis, when a familiar step on the walk startled her slightly and deepened the color on her cheek; then a voice close at her side said, "Let me help you. My superior height will give me an advantage in training those taller tendrils."

"Thank you," she answered, accepting his offer, but without looking round, and feeling her cheeks grow hot, for she knew instinctively what was coming.

He praised the beauty of the vine; then presently they turned from it to the flower-beds, and for a little made conversation about them.

Neither felt a very deep interest in the subject-matter of discourse at that moment; there was shortly a pause in the stream of talk, and summoning up all his courage, Warren began upon the theme that lay nearest his heart.

He told Miriam frankly that he loved her and wanted to make her his wife; that she had attracted him strongly from the first hour of their acquaintance, and more and more as he learned to know her better and perceived the beauty of her character, till months ago she had become so dear to his heart that he felt he should be able to find little joy in life without her sweet companionship; that he had refrained from speaking till now only because of his straitened circumstances, but lately he had learned that an investment had turned out remarkably well, and as he had now a constantly

increasing and lucrative practice, he felt justified in making her an offer of his heart and hand, having a reasonable prospect of being able to support her in comfort.

He paused, but receiving no reply, went on again.

"I feel, dear Miss Miriam, that your worth is far beyond my deserts, but I am sure no one could love you better or be more earnestly and sincerely determined to do all in his power to make your life bright and happy."

Still no reply.

"I fear I have not won your heart," he sighed, "but, dear girl, can you not give me a little hope that I may be able to do so in time?"

"I thank you sincerely for your generous offer, Captain Charlton," she responded at last, speaking in low, tremulous tones, and with half-averted face, "but—but—I think I cannot be spared from home; I think grandmother, the children, Ronald, all need me. Grandmother is too old to bear alone the burden of household cares and responsibilities, and Ronald is not yet strong enough to take charge of the farm."

"I see it all," he said; "your noble, self-sacrificing spirit increases my esteem and affection, and I would not ask you to forsake a duty for my sake; but can you not give me some hope for the future?"

"I do not approve of long engagements," she said, evasively.

"We need not settle the question of its length at present," he said, in ardent tones, taking her hand and raising it to his lips; "only let me know that you care for me even a very little, and I shall not despair of winning you at last."

She did not refuse or withdraw the hand he had taken, nor did she repulse him when he ventured upon more pronounced demonstrations of love.

He drew her hand within his arm and led her to an arbor at the foot of the garden.

There time passed very swiftly, and the moon was already shining in the sky when they returned to the house with faces radiant with happiness, and the captain announced to Mrs. Heath and Ronald, whom they found alone together on the porch, that he and Miriam were plighted to each other for life.

"But I am not going to leave you yet, dear grandmother," Miriam said, in low, tremulous tones, as the old lady folded her to her heart and wept over her in mingled joy and grief.

"Oh, my darling, I don't know what we could ever do without you!" she sobbed, holding the dear girl in a close embrace; "and yet I could not for a moment think of standing in the way of your happiness, dear, unselfish child that you are, and have always been!"

"Surely there's no need of either alternative," said Ronald, jocosely; "we've only to take Warren in and make him a permanent addition to the family—a valuable one he will be, too. So, young folks, I give you my blessing, and gracefully accept the situation."

"Certainly it would be a delightful arrangement for us, Ronald," the old lady said. "We are willing to share our dear Miriam with you, Captain Charlton, if you will not rob us of her altogether."

"There will be plenty of time to talk it over, grandma, before anything need be settled," Miriam said, with a blush and a shy glance up into her lover's face.

"Yes," he said, with a proud, fond look at her; "I appreciate your kindness, dear madam, and could not find it in my heart to make so mean a return as to rob you of your rightful share in one who owes much of her lovely womanhood to your tender care and training."

CHAPTER XX.

MIRIAM woke the next morning with a lighter and happier heart than she had carried in her bosom for years ; ever since the tide of the cruel War of the Rebellion had swept away the father upon whom she had been wont to lean from early infancy, her young shoulders had borne burdens all too heavy for their strength.

But now one as strong and even dearer than that loved and honored parent had come forward with gallant, tender entreaties that she would let him bear them for her ; he would do it from love, and he was no less capable than willing. What a rest it would be to lean on his strength and look to him for guidance and support in the trials and duties of life !

She was up earlier than her wont, though it was a rare occurrence, indeed, when the sun found her in her bed, and came down-stairs with a glad song upon her lips.

Sandy met her in the lower hall. "Gude-mornin', Miss Mirry," he said, and she noticed a slight tremble in his voice, a distressed look on his face.

It stopped the song on her lips, and set her

heart to beating faster with a nameless fear (such dreadful, dreadful things had happened of late).

"Sandy, what is wrong?" she asked, catching at the balustrade for support.

"Naething to fright ye, Miss Mirry," he said, reassuringly, "but come wi' me and I'll show ye," leading the way out through the porch into the garden. "I hae but just found her, the poor, lone creature, and I want you to tell me what shall be done wi' her."

"Who, Sandy? Of whom are you talking?" queried Miriam, following, and with difficulty keeping close to him, as he passed with hurried steps around the house and down the path that led to the barn-yard and the fields beyond.

"I'll show ye in a minute, Miss Mirry. I dinna ken who she is, an' I much doot if ye're ony wiser than mysel' on that point, but she's in an awfu' condition, and canna be lang for this warld."

In another moment he had halted beside a haystack, at the foot of which lay a woman clothed in filthy rags, pale, dishevelled, unconscious, lying with closed eyes, but moaning feebly as if in pain.

"Poor, poor creature!" cried Miriam, leaning over her and dropping hot tears on the pallid face. "Oh, Sandy, who can she be? and what has brought her to this? She doesn't look like a gypsy, I don't think she is a for-

eigner ; but, oh, what she must have suffered ! What can we do for her ?"

"Not much, I fear, my dear young leddy," answered McAllister. "She's dyin', I think, and I dinna ken whether she could be moved without hastenin' the end that canna be far off."

"The doctor must be sent for at once," said Miriam, with decision.

"I've started Peter off for him already," returned McAllister, "and na doot he'll be here afore lang."

"Could we give her anything in the mean time ?—food or medicine ?" Miriam asked. "She looks famished."

"She does that, Miss Mirry."

"Stay by her and I'll run to the house for some warm milk," Miriam said, speeding away as she spoke.

She was back again almost immediately, and Sandy raising the poor woman's head, she poured a little of the milk into her mouth. After several trials they succeeded in getting her to swallow a few drops, but she did not open her eyes.

By that time Dr. Jasper had arrived, and Captain Charlton with him. They looked at the wanderer, then exchanged grave, significant glances.

"Do you know her ?" asked Miriam, and both answered, "It is Belinda Himes."

"Is it possible !" exclaimed Miriam, in low,

moved tones. "Doctor, can you do nothing for her?"

"Nothing!" he sighed; "she is dying—will live but a few minutes, I think."

"Dying," cried Miriam, deeply moved; "and, oh, I fear she is not ready for heaven!"

Dropping on her knees by the side of the poor creature, and putting her lips to her ear, "Look to Jesus," she said, in pitying accents; "He is your only hope in this hour, but 'He is able to save to the uttermost;' look and live! Oh, cry to Him at once, 'Lord, save or I perish!'"

"I think she does not hear you," the doctor said, with emotion.

"Hark! she seems to be trying to speak," said Mrs. Heath, who had joined the little group a moment before.

At that a deep silence fell on them, each ear being intent to catch the words that presently came slowly, gaspingly, from the pale lips already stiffening in death—"The—way—of—trans—gressors—is hard."

Her eyes remained closed; she did not seem conscious of their presence or of anything; two or three long-drawn breaths followed the words, and then all was still.

A moment's solemn silence, broken by the voice of Sandy McAllister in low, moved tones, "Poor, misguided creature! she has, na doot, proved the truth o' those words o' inspiration

in the sad experience o' the past few weeks. She's been in hiding frae the law, and has died o' want an' misery."

They gave her decent burial, paying the expense out of the money left by her husband. They knew of no relative or friend to summon to her obsequies, and there was no one to drop a tear of affection upon her lonely grave. She and Phelim O'Rourke were reaping in another world what they had sown in this.

Deprived of their leader, and fearing to share his fate at the hands of those who had dealt out stern justice to him, the rest of the band had fled the vicinity, and peace, quietness, and security reigned all up and down Wild River Valley ; but the story of its tragedy will linger for years, if not forever, in the minds of its inhabitants—a tragedy that was largely the result of a disregard on the part of the law-makers of the State of that law of God—"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

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